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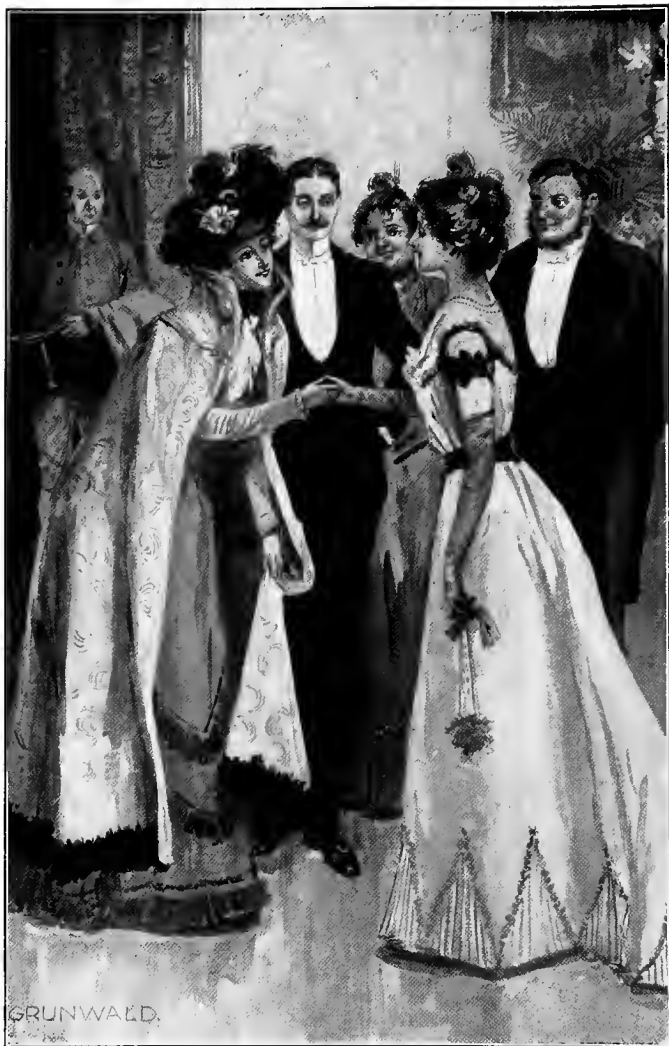


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"GOOD-BYE, DEAR LITTLE BRIDE," SHE SAID TO POLLY.—Page 161

THE BINKS FAMILY

THE STORY OF A SOCIAL
REVOLUTION

BY
JOHN STRANGE WINTER

AUTHOR OF

"THE MONEY SENSE," "HEART AND SWORD," "BOOTLES' BABY,"
"THE TRUTH-TELLERS," ETC.



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The Binks Family.

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THE BINKS FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF BINKS AND SONS.

“One man’s meat is another man’s poison!”

I MAY as well own up to the truth, first as last, and admit that I was always of an ambitious turn. I never can see, myself, why ambition should be counted (as most people count it in others) as one of the seven deadly sins. It is the natural instinct of every human being; it is the word which we use when we are writing essays, to express, what, in everyday conversation, we call “getting on.” Why shouldn’t people try to get on? My dear mother always used to say,

when the people at our chapel persisted in calling her worldly: "Well, you may call me worldly if you like, but it's my opinion that we was sent here to do our duty in this world, as well as to prepare us for a better. If I goes to chapel," she used to say, "five nights out of the week, I don't say I shouldn't enjoy myself above a bit, and hear all the latest scandal that's going on. But I couldn't keep my husband's clothes tidy, nor the potatoes out of my children's stockings. And my Joe, he says: 'You're better off here, Old Girl, setting at your sewing, and me a-reading of the noospaper to you, than you would be set in that there chapel a-listening to all the elders a-ranting about the way to save your soul, and a-making all the silly women that goes to hear 'em that dazzled with the glory of Christ, that they can't see to do the every day duty the Lord has put into their very 'ands.'" "Seems to me," father used to say, "that them elders'll have a good deal to

answer to when we come to reckoning up at the end. I never had much opinion of elders—they've mostly been off color since the time of Susanna."

Now, when I look back from where I am now, I often think that my father and mother were out of the common run—father in judging for himself and, though he was a regular chapel-goer and paid his sittings like clock-work, taking his religion with a grain of common sense; and mother in sticking to him and us, and making us of more daily importance than her minister and her chapel.

Father was always ambitious. His early existence had been checkered; if all mother let slip and all our relations let fly was true, his youth must have been as much a mixture of good luck and bad as a chessboard is of black and white squares. I believe he had tried most things, and then he met with mother, who had been years

and years in service with an old lady of title, at whose death she had come into a nice little legacy, which, with her savings and pickings, made her quite a catch. Mother was well turned thirty when old Lady Anna died, but she had admirers in plenty, and was able to pick and choose as she would. And as father was a fine figure of a man, and had a very taking kind of way with him, he carried the day, and they were married.

At that time he was employed on a milk-walk, which, truth to tell, was how he made mother's acquaintance. Of course, after they were married, as mother was quite well off, he was not going to stop under a master when he might be on his own. So he bought a milk-walk not a hundred miles from where he had been employed, and they settled down comfortably to everyday life.

As I said, father was always ambitious, and he

got on! Not but what de deserved to do so; for, if mother had been a lucky bird to him in giving him the capital necessary to start with, he was, first and last, an uncommon good husband to her. Never the inside of a public-house saw him, and when he had finished his work he always spent his evenings quietly with mother in the parlor behind the shop. I remember once when I was very little, hearing a gentleman say to father with a sneer:

“Oh, well, if you’re tied to your wife’s apron-string, it’s no use asking you to come, I suppose.”

“I may be tied to my missis’s apron-string,” I heard father say in reply; “and if I am, I tied the knot myself. When I untie it, it’ll be for some one that interests me more than she does, and I’ve got to find her *or him* first. Good day to you.”

I remember so well how mother gave a sort of choke in her throat, and how she ran into the shop as soon as the tempter had gone, and caught

hold of father behind the big shining milk-cans and the bushy plants which stood in a row along the counter.

“ Oh, Binks ! ” she cried. “ Oh, Binks ! ”

There, don't take on, Old Girl,” he said in his rough, kind way. “ I gets many temptations to join clubs and such like ; but as long as you make 'ome to me what you do, it's easy to say, ‘ Get thee behind me, Satan. ’ ”

We did not stay long in that house, which was the second business that father had worked up. It wasn't his way to grub along from hand to mouth, making himself contented and happy with a fair profit, and laying by nothing for the future. No ; his idea was to put all his energies into his “ walk ” until he had worked it up into a thoroughly good connection, and then to sell it for a good price and start fresh on a new lay.

I don't know whether the same thing has even struck you, but a milk-walk isn't the most pleas-

ant line a married couple can take up. Somehow, it often seems to cause quarrels, and then the husbands get led astray and the wives get mad and jealous, and, after that, everything seems to go wrong with them. I've always thought that going round seeing so many different servants had a good deal to do with it. You see, every one of them has a civil "good morning" for the milkman, particularly when he has a taking way, and they, perhaps, don't get out from one week's end to another. Then, if matters are not very smooth at home, and the poor man is always torn between his duty to a snappy wife and the pleasure of chatting to a smiling, pleasant-spoken cook, it's as likely as not that things will soon come to such a pass that the milk-walk is in the market and going cheap.

It was by taking advantage of these upsets that father first began to get on. He sold his own snug, flourishing business and bought one where

the husband had gone off with a young woman in the very next street, leaving his wife behind to do as she liked with the business, by way of providing for her.

Now, it happened in this case that the wife had been in the dressmaking, and knew no more of how to run a milk-walk than she did of how to write stories in the *Family Herald*. So she was glad to dispose of the fittings and connection to father for a sum down that would enable her to start again at her own trade.

It was this business that I remember. I think we lived in that house for about three years. I don't remember going there, but I do remember, when I was about six years old, father coming in one evening just at tea-time and clapping his hand down on mother's back.

"Old Girl," he said, "I've sold the business."

"Lor', Binks, you don't say so!" she cried, looking half frightened.

"But I do. I've got to go through the books and all that, but the actual bargain's made, and I've put my 'and to it."

"A good price, Binks?" she asked.

"Four 'underd and fifty," he replied.

"That's a good price, Binks," said mother; then added in a sort of fright: "Not the furniture, Binks?"

"Nothing inside of them two doors," said my father, pointing to the door which led to the shop and then to the door which led to the yard.

They talked their plans over, and father told her how he had to jump at the offer or leave it, as the incomer wanted to be married at once, and was very keen on having a home of his own to bring his wife straight to. So, for the next week or two, we were all in a bustle and a scrimmage, and mother told everybody who came in that she felt like being torn up by the roots and

that she had quite thought father had settled down at Orpington Road for good and all.

“My husband is such an ambitious man, madam,” she explained to one lady who came in—an excellent customer, too, she was, that had cream every Sunday, and on her “at home” days as well—“never satisfied to sit down and take life easy; always pressing onward.”

“Well, Mr. Binks, I’m sorry you’re leaving the neighborhood,” said the lady. “But we are not thinking of staying much longer ourselves, so we should have had to part very soon. ‘As to Mr. Binks being ambitious, so much the better for him and for you. I believe in ambitious men. They never waste their lives.

A very few days after this we left Orpington Road forever. To us children the very idea of moving was delightful. All the house was turned topsy-turvy, and the last day we had to eat our

dinner off a shelf in the kitchen. Even then we didn't exactly know where we were going, and mother went about packing busily, with alternately a joke and a text on her lips.

At last when it was getting near tea-time, father came bustling in.

"Old Girl," he said, in a loud, cheerful voice, "I've found a place, tip-top, and no mistake about it. A shop like a palace, a fine, roomy house, and the neighborhood A1. It'll be a real treat working up the connection."

"And are we going in to-morrow?" asked mother.

"No. We can store our things in the outbuildings, but the shop must be properly fitted; and we had better have the house done while we're about it. But you needn't look so scared, Old Girl; I've thought it all out. We'll see the things safely in, and then we'll go down to Margate for a week and take a little holiday. I can

run up and down and see to the fittings and such like."

Mother gave a long sort of sigh.

"Binks," she said, "a holiday will do us all good. We've worked hard, you and me, since we was married, and it's a poor heart that never rejoices. But what do you mean about fittings? Isn't the shop fitted already?"

Father then unfolded all his plans.

"Old Girl," he said, "I haven't found a going concern anyhow to my taste. Buying a connection is all very well, but you've got to take the drawbacks along with the advantages. I 'ad to buy this business—'cause why? That we hadn't money enough to keep going on while I worked up a connection. Now all that's different. I've taken a splendid shop in a fine neighborhood bordering on the park, and I'm going to launch out and cut a dash. Best of milk and other dairy produce, and a fine shop fitted with

all the latest ideas, to say nothing of a good business 'ead and a civil tongue to manage, them's enough to make any concern a going concern."

"And there isn't a business near by?" said mother.

"Not within three streets," he returned, triumphantly.

My mother gave another sigh.

"Well, Binks, she said, "you're not one to put your hand to the plow and look back. I'm sure, if you lay your mind to it, that you'll carry it through and succeed in the end. For myself, I haven't the go and dash that you have, and I should have set down here quite content to the end of my days. But," she went on, "if I haven't got your go, Binks, I've never been, and I never mean to be, a drag on you; so I'm with you, Binks, in whatever you think best to do."

"Old Girl," said father, in a queer, rough sort of voice, "if you weren't just what you are, I

shouldn't be any good to any one. It was you made me what I am ; it was you give me something to work for ; it was through you I done it all. I don't forget you might have choose differently, but you chose me, Old Girl, and you trusted me with your money, and I want to prove myself worthy of it and you."

CHAPTER II.

ASTLEY CRESCENT.

“It’s a poor heart that never rejoices!”

AFTER our holiday at Margate we went back to the new house. Father had been down several times during our stay, for the week had stretched itself into a fortnight, but he had spent most of the time in London, looking after the new premises.

“It’s no partic’lar holiday to me loafing about doing nothing,” he remarked to mother, when he was going back the first time after three days by the sea. “I’m not like the kids, that can take their pleasure a-grubbing in the sand and a-listening to the niggers. I’m uneasy-like. My heart’s up there with the new business, and it’s

change enough for me to be seeing after them fittings instead of going my rounds with the cart. I shan't come down again till Saturday afternoon.

I've often thought since, when thinking over the past, and taking a lesson from what it teaches, that the reason why father got on, hand-over-fist as he did, was because he put every bit of himself into what he was about. He made his business his work and his play, too. I admired him for it, and I sympathize with it too, for, of all us, I have most of father's nature in me; for I'm like that, too. I've no patience with people that half do things, and get tired midway when they've set out on a certain course. Perhaps one can't quite see the end of the journey, but it's paltry to sit down and cry off just because the future looks a bit dark, and things don't all pan out just as easy as we want them to.

I don't think, myself, that father ever knew what it was to be daunted. The new shop fairly

took our breath away when we drove up to the door in a cab on our return from Margate. Our Polly pinched me hard in her excitement.

"Look, look, Anna Maria!" she cried, "there it is—all shining pails and big windows! Oh, my!"

It was a shop! The walls were all blue and white tiles, and the counters were white marble, with brass edges that shone like gold. There were great green plants in big blue vases, and in each great window were great glass globes with lots of goldfish in them, and at the back of each was stood a great gilt cow. At the back of the shop was a glass counting-house, with a window to shut up and down, and the floor was all dark-blue tiles. I had never seen such a palace of a place before, and I stood on the blue tiles and turned myself round and round as if I were in a dream.

"Is this ours?" I asked, feeling rather frightened than otherwise.

"Every bit ours," said father, stooping down to kiss me.

It is wonderful how easy we get used to grandeur. When a few weeks had gone by, Polly and I were no more scared by our grand new shop than we had been by our old one in Orpington Road. At first we used to tip-toe across the tiled floor, as if our little shoes could hurt it; but very soon we played about among all the grandeur quite naturally, and never gave a thought to it. At that time mother always dressed us in large pinafores of bright blue zephyr, and as both Polly and me were very fair, and she always kept us without spot or speck, the customers took a great deal of notice of us. I remember one lady in particular, who came to taste the milk, telling mother that she had to be very careful, as her children were very delicate, always ailing with something or other.

Mother took very high ground. "I'm sure,

madam," she said—and let me say here that mother had a very grand sort of manner—"that children's health depends a great deal on what dairy they are supplied from. There's a deal of fuss made about oysters, but the harm oysters do is not to be spoken of in the same breath with the harm done by poor milk. Very few people eat oysters, to begin with, but every one uses milk. Most dairies aren't clean enough, and many dairymen haven't the least notion where the milk they sell comes from."

"Then you keep your own cows, Mrs.—Mrs. Binks?"

"We do, madam, but only for a very few delicate babies. But we get our milk direct from three large milk-farms, and my husband employs a veterinary surgeon to see the animals twice a week, and twice a week he has his report as to whether all this is right."

“And if it isn’t?” the lady asked.

“If a single animal ails the least thing it is separated at once from the rest, and the milk is simply taken away and destroyed. It is not even given to the pigs. My husband, madam, is not a man who simply buys so many cans of milk and sells it again at a profit. He thinks out every turn of his business, and takes every precaution against the least thing going wrong.”

‘At this moment the lady happened to notice Polly and me as we stood listening. “Are these your little girls, Mrs. Binks?” she asked.

“Yes, madam,” said mother, laying a hand on Polly’s golden curls, “and though I say it, that shouldn’t, I think they speak very well for the quality of milk they drink.”

“They do, indeed,” said the lady, looking down at us with a smile.

After that, Polly and me were in the shop more

than ever. We went to school, of course, but between school-hours mother always encouraged us to be in the shop with her.

“If they are at school, Binks,” she said to father, “why, I know where they are, and what they’re doing; and if they’re in the shop I know what they’re after, for I can see them all the time. But if they’re out in the yard among the lads, or even in the kitchen along of the servants, they may be picking up habits that they’ll never be able to cast. And they’re no detriment to the business, Binks, while they’ve got such roses as they have.”

“As my Lady Countess of Dreddingham is proof,” said my father, chuckling.

“That’s right,” said mother. “I’m sure, Binks, you might have knocked me down with a feather when she gave me her card for the address, and me been talking to her as plain and bold as you please. But the Countess of Dreddingham’s been

a rare good customer to us, and has spoke for us right and left."

It was as mother truly said. When the anxious, sweet-voiced lady who was so full of trouble for her delicate children turned out to be a real countess, and a very influential one at that, the business increased at such a rate that mother had to give up all her work indoors, and to keep herself entirely free for the shop. And, as she would have things kept right up to the mark, so that father should always have a comfortable home and a thorough good dinner, she kept a good cook and a capable housemaid.

"None of your untrained slovens for me," she used to say. "I give good wages and keep a good table, and I know exactly what I want. That's nothing unreasonable—a fair day's work done without a misses dodging all day long at their heels. If the girls know their work and can

do it, well and good ; if they can't, or won't, out they go."

Then she began to find the sewing get beyond her.

"Binks," she said to father one day, "I'm going to get a mother's help."

"All right, Old Girl," said father.

"I can't keep up with the sewing," mother exclaimed. "Time was when I could get through a good bit while I was minding the shop ; but, now that the business has got so large, I haven't a minute to spare from the books."

"You wouldn't like a reg'lar bookkeeper, Old Lady?" said father. "The business'll well stand it, you know."

"No, Binks, not yet awhile. While I've got my hand on it I know exactly where we're going, without you having to bother your head about it. If we get a young lady for the books, she mightn't understand all the customers' little fads.

as I do. I'd rather go on as we are for a bit, and have a bit more help in the house, which won't cost near as much."

"Right you are!" said father, cheerfully.

So several years went by, and still we were living in the house in Astley Crescent. Mother always said that she shouldn't let herself get really attached to the place, although she had a handsome drawing-room and a piano, and Polly and me were learning music, and used to play to mother and father in the evenings and on Sundays.

"If I hold it with a light hand," she said more than once, "I shan't feel the wrench when your father takes it into his head that we shall do better elsewhere."

But father never did take that idea—no; but he added several other businesses to ours, and he quite gave up going out with the milk. But then he bought a very smart pony and cart, and spent

all his time going from one business to another, seeing to this, that and the other. And then, as his connection grew and grew, so did he become sole consumer of the various milk-farms where he dealt; and also he started a dairy farm of his own a few miles down in Bucks, and sometimes he used to take one or other of us with him when he went to see how things were going on there.

He had altered very much by this time, father had. I can remember when he always wore light blue-gray clothes in winter and white drill in summer; and latterly, at Astley Crescent, he used to have a clean suit on every day of his life when the weather was hot. Then, when he gave up going the rounds, he began to wear darker clothes, and then to have black ones like a gentleman. I can tell you he used to look as smart as smart when he drove away from the door in a black frock coat and a high hat, with his dogskin driving gloves, and his clean handkerchief just

showing out of his breast-pocket. But though he was altered outwardly, father was just the same in himself—a plain, bluff, hearty, down-right sort of man with no nonsense about him, devoted to mother, and going straight on his own road, turning neither to right nor left for any man or anything.

Then, when I was about fifteen, a great change came into our lives. As usual, father sprung it on mother as a regular surprise.

“Old Lady,” he said one day, just when we were finishing supper, “I’ve been thinking out things a bit, and I think it’s about time we made a change.”

“As how?” said mother.

“Well,” said he, “it seems to me we’ve been ’ere long enough. It’s done us very well, ’as ’Astley Crescent, and I’ve nothing to say again’ it, but it’s time you chucked business and took your ease, as I do.”

"I'm sure you don't, Binks," mother cried, indignantly.

"Well, in a way, I don't," returned he, laughing. "But all the same, it's pleasanter work driving round in a smart pony-cart, just bossing things, than it is driving round with the milk-cans, no matter how well shined they be. You've got a gold watch, Old Lady, and a sealskin jacket, it's true; but it's high time you 'ad a villa and a conservatory, and lived like a lady, instead of being tied by the leg to the business as you are now. D' ye see?"

"I'm contented enough," began mother; when he broke in——

"Aye, you're as good as gold; but I'm not contented to see you a-slaving 'ere any longer. We're worth a tidy penny now, Old Lady. We're warm people; and I want you to enjoy yourself in your way as I do in mine."

CHAPTER III.

TED'S WIFE.

WE did not hurry way from Astley Crescent, for, as father said, going from business into private life was a far more serious step than merely changing from one shop to another. But he kept his eyes open, and when he heard of a nice property going, he would drive over at once and see it. Time and again this happened, but there was always something that turned him against each fresh house that he saw. Either it was too near water or a railway ran in close proximity, or the drainage was doubtful, or the set of the house was wrong. More than once he declared that he would give up all idea of finding a suburban house to his taste, and that it would be best to look out for a nice, cheerful house in town. But

mother, who had been born and brought up in the country, longed so for something of a country life that he started off on his search yet once again.

This time he went a little farther out, and at last he met with just what he wanted at Norwood, taking Rosedale for one year, with the option of buying at a certain price at the end of the time.

Then he began to see that he had made a mistake.

“Old Lady,” he said to mother, when they had just come in from a long day spent at a great furniture shop in the West End, “I’ve blundered this bit of business.”

“You have?” said mother in surprise. Mother had a great idea of father’s business capacity.

“I have that same,” he said. “See here! The landlord allows so much for decorating—we spend three times as much, and, if we leave at the

end of the year, all our money is clean chucked away. I'll go down and clinch the bargain right away, and then we can spend what we like on the place without feeling that it's a waste."

"And if we don't like it?" suggested mother.

"Then we can look out for a place we shall like, and we shall 'ave an extra bit of house property on our 'ands," said he.

He was as good as his word, and went straight away to see the owner of Rosedale, and arrange to buy it at once instead of waiting the year. That was the best of father; when he once made up his mind there was no shilly-shallying, for with him to decide was to do. Before a week had gone by Rosedale belonged to us, and he and mother went happily on with arrangements for furnishing and getting it ready for occupation.

They decided to take nothing away from 'Astley Crescent. For one thing, my eldest brother, now three and twenty, was just going to be

married, and would have the house to live in. As father said, everything was suited to the house and to the business; and though he was marrying a girl with a tidy fortune, she was sensible and saw things in the same light that we did.

“And by and by,” said father, “when our Ted gets on a bit, he’ll be able to buy you a villa, and to furnish it new for you.”

“Well, as to that, Mr. Binks,” said Rosalind, with a laugh, “I’m not so desperately keen on a villa in the suburbs. I’ve lived in the suburbs all my life, and Astley Crescent will make a nice change for me. Besides, I’d rather be close at hand and see Ted have his meals comfortable than sit in state in a villa, with a rush to catch the train of a morning and no one to speak to till he came home at night, too tired out to throw a word at a dog, like pa is. No! Astley Crescent will do me very well, and I’m very much obliged

to you and Ted's ma for turning out to make room for us."

At this our Ted looked round with a proud smile, and mother gave a sort of choke, as she always did when she was upset; and father, he jumped up and kissed Rosalind heartily as she stood before the fire.

"You're the very girl for our Ted," he exclaimed. "God bless you, my dear; my lad's going to be as lucky as I've been;" and then he turned away, and, flourishing out his great silk handkerchief, he blew his nose as if he had half a dozen colds rolled into one.

As for mother, she fairly sobbed.

"Yes, you're the girl for Ted," she cried. "I only hope you'll be as happy in his house as I've been, and be as blessed in your husband as I've been and am in mine. Our Ted will never have to work as his father's done, because his way has been made easy. If the sins of the fathers are

visited on the children, so do the children reap the advantages of their parents having been God-fearing and loving with one another. The law of the Lord tells both for good and for evil, and our Ted is able to marry to a fine business, and to begin almost where we are leaving off."

I began to understand why our Ted was so taken up with Rosalind Browne. She was no particular beauty—just a tall, fine-grown girl, with a pert nose, a wide mouth and a glinting eye. But she had a heart, too, for she set herself down on the arm of mother's chair and put her arm round her shoulders.

"There, don't take on, ma, dear," she said, smoothing mother's hair with her other hand. "I know what you must feel like giving up the house you've lived in so long, to a girl you aren't quite sure of. But it'll be all right, ma, dear. I love Ted, and Ted loves me; and you must try to

think of me as if I was one of your own kids and not like a ma-in-law at all."

"My dear girl," sobbed mother—"my dear, dear girl!"

"I've no ma of my own to go to," Rosalind went on presently, "and there'll be many a little thing I shall want your help in. So you must be a real ma to me, and I'll try to be as much to you as Ted is. And whenever you want to come to town for a bit, you'll remember that this is your home as well as mine."

At this father blew his nose again like a trumpet, and Ted looked as if he was going to cry. But mother could always conquer her feelings, and she pulled herself up sharp, and, turning round, kissed her son's intended bride very heartily.

"No, my dear, dear girl," she said; "I shall never forget it. And I want you to remember

this, the first bit of advice I have ever given you. This is to be your home, my dear, and you must be its mistress, you, and you alone. Never give up that position for an hour to any other woman, not even to me; or, as some people would say, least of all to me. We shall come, all of us, dear girl, but only when we are sure that it is quite convenient to you and Ted."

"Dear ma," said Rosalind, "you may be quite sure you'll always find it convenient to me and Ted."

That was how Rosalind Browne first began to call our mother anything but Mrs. Binks.

"I don't wonder Ted's so mashed on her as he is," said Polly to me. "She isn't pretty, but she's got such a way with her, and she's so stylish. The way she says 'ma' is so different to plain mother, isn't it?"

It was from hearing Rosalind that we gradually got into the way of saying "pa" and

"ma," Polly and me. I don't know whether they quite liked it, but Rosalind always called them "pa" and "ma," and they couldn't very well find fault with us for calling them as she did. And they really were, both of them, that taken up with Rosalind that it seemed as if she couldn't say or do anything wrong for them.

We moved from Astley Crescent to Rosedale just three days after Ted and Rosalind were married. Of course, we all went to the wedding, and Polly and me were bridesmaids as well as Rosalind's two sisters. She wore a white silk gown with a long train, with a shower of tulle over her head, and a sort of little crown of orange blossoms. The bridesmaids were all dressed alike in pale blue, with big blue hats, and bangles given by the bridegroom. I think the only thing father grudged was that Ted had to do so much, for what with bouquets and bangles and other

things, his extras didn't cost him a penny under thirty pounds.

But, as Ted himself said, there's a difference in weddings, and it's the bride that makes it.

"If I was marrying a girl with two frocks, and no more belonging to her than a few things scraped together out of her own earnings in her bottom drawer, I should have no more expense than paying for the bans and the ring. But when a fellow is marrying a girl with a hundred a year of her own, to say nothing of what's to follow, he can't do things on the cheap as he could if she had nothing tied to her tail."

"Which," as pa said, "is sound reason, and no more than common sense."

Rosalind's pa gave a splendid sit-down breakfast, with oyster-patties and champagne, and ever so many other good things. And there were lots of speeches, and then Ted tried to pull the bride's ring off, and there was all sorts of fun. And

then she suddenly rose and rustled away with her next eldest sister to change her white silk frock for her traveling gown, which was a smart tailor-made costume of dark brown, worn with a seal-skin coat—one of Ted's wedding presents to her.

And then they said good-bye to every one, and we had a chance of looking over the wedding presents, because all the company cleared out as if it was rather improper to stay in the house for ten minutes after the bride and bridegroom had taken their departure. And my, what presents they had! Silver and glass and fine china without end; and a complete table service of best electro in a case, a grand piano, and a lovely drawing-room lounge. I wondered where they would put everything, and how they would stow all the silver and glass and things away; but ma soon disposed of them all, in her own mind, that is.

“Rosalind will very likely make the little room

on the second floor into a keepi..g-room, she said. "If I was her, I should have it fitted properly with white wood shelves and cupboard. Then she'll have a chance of keeping all her pretty things so that they'll be a pleasure rather than a trouble to her."

However, she only made the suggestion, and left it to Ted's wife—how queer it sounded!—to do as she liked about carrying it out. Mother—I mean ma—like all the rest of us, was too busy over her own move to poke her nose into her daughter-in-law's business. And yet, as ma said, we needn't have been so fussed about it, for we were taking nothing away from Astley Crescent but a few little personal belongings—ornaments that ma valued above the ordinary, and that she meant to put in her own bedroom and dressing-room.

And, at last, we made the move, and went into private life, leaving the shop behind us forever,

Polly was then just on the point of eighteen, being just a year and a half older than me. The night we first passed at Rosedale, as we sat over the fire in our bedroom doing our hairs, she talked the situation over with me. I must tell you that when we had first discussed the new home, ma had given Polly and me our choice in certain matters.

“Now, here are two nice, sunny, cheerful rooms,” she said. “Would you like them furnished as bedrooms, or will you still sleep in one room and have the other for your sitting-room?”

“As a sitting-room, ma,” we both cried in a breath.

We had always been used to sharing a bedroom, Polly and me, and I think either of us would be frightened to sleep in a room alone.

So ma furnished the second room as a sitting-room in white and gold, and pa gave us a little white-and-gold piano. The carpet was pale blue,

and the curtains were striped blue and white, with a gold cord at the edges; and with all our photos and other odds and ends, the little room was as dainty a little nest as two young girls ever had to call their own.

"Now, Anna Maria," said Polly to me, as we sat over the fire that first night in our new home, "we've got a smart house and a smart boudoir of our own, and we must live up to it."

"Is this our boudoir?" I asked, looking round the pretty bedroom.

"No, silly—this is our bedroom. The sitting-room is our boudoir, only we mustn't call it so, because ma's own little sitting-room, next the morning-room, is to be called the boudoir."

"Who said so?" I asked, wondering at Polly's knowledge of big private houses and their ways.

"Nobody said so. I saw it on the bell-board, and I went and rang all the bells till I found out which was which. And then I remembered that

that was what they called the room where Rosalind's presents were all laid out in. I wouldn't ask them exactly how they called it, because it's bad enough not to know things without letting on to outsiders that one doesn't know. See?"

I said yes; but don't know that I did see exactly.

"What do you call it?" I asked, wishing to make quite sure.

"The boo-dore," said Polly, very distinctly.

"'The boo-dore,' all right; I won't forget. But what are we to call our room?" I asked.

"That's just what I can't think," said Polly; "but I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll keep our ears open, and see what other girls call their rooms, when we get to know the people round about."

CHAPTER IV.

ROSEDALE.

“It’s hard to sleep in down when you’ve been used to straw.”

I THINK what struck every one of us at Rose-dale was the unearthly quiet. I had never been in such a ghastly stillness in all my life. Everybody knows, of course, that Astley Crescent is one of the main thoroughfares of South Kensington, and enough traffic went up and down the road by day and by night alike to have woke the very dead. I’m sure if one had a cold or anything, one had only to sit at one of our drawing-room windows to be as well amused as if one was at the play; for what with the cabs and carriages always dashing up and down, the gayly dressed ladies peering in and out of the different shops;

the pretty children with their nurses, the smart young men on the lookout for the smart young ladies, and the old gentlemen who came to get up an appetite on the sunny side of the way, why, Astley Crescent was a regular *tableau vivant*, and far more amusing than any of the *tableaux vivants* that they got up several winters at Astley Chapel in aid of the new organ funds. Exactly opposite to our house was a shop kept by a lady of title, Lady Millicent Goode. I used to watch them, and so did Polly; and I fancy if mother had known all that went on behind the rose-colored silk curtains she would have forbidden us to sit at the windows which overlooked them. But ma was always so busy in the little glass counting-house, or talking to our customers that came in, that she never had time to attend to her neighbors' business.

Lady Millicent came across to speak to ma the very day she took possession of her premises.

"I am Lady Millicent Goode, Mrs. Binks," she said, in most pleasant tones. "I've taken the house opposite, and my friend, Lady Dreddingham, told me I was to be sure to deal with you for my milk and things."

"I am very much obliged to her ladyship, my lady," said ma, very politely. "May I ask if your ladyship is going to live there?"

"I am," said Lady Millicent, with a gay laugh. "I'm going to start a milliner's business, and I'm going to have afternoon tea going every day from four to six o'clock. So I want you to supply me with cream and with the freshest of fresh butter every day but Saturday. I believe in a half holiday once a week, Mrs. Binks, don't you?"

"Well, my lady," said ma, in her most doubtful tone, "I suppose a holiday now and again is a very good thing; but those that insist most on

holidays generally insist on having their milk delivered just the same."

"Ah, I dare say," said her ladyship. "There's such a difference between my holiday and yours, isn't there?"

They talked a little more about the milk and cream and butter that would be wanted; and then mother, who was nothing if not fair, especially to other tradespeople, suggested that it would be best to send over so many little jugs filled with cream, and to take back at six o'clock all that had not been used.

"Nay," Lady Millicent said quickly; it would be a waste to the jugs unless we were sure they would be used. Send over a jug of a size to fill so many little jugs, every afternoon at ten minutes to four, and another at ten minutes to five. Then if trade has been slack, I can say I don't want the second one."

"Very good, my lady," said ma, smiling.

"And, Mrs. Binks," Lady Millicent went on, "you must be neighborly, and come and patronize me."

"My lady," said ma, "I know what trade is far better than you do. If any of your smart customers was to see me going in and out of your premises, they would go elsewhere for their bonnets."

"Nonsense! Oh, I'm not going to do business like that, I can tell you. I shall only get the very best French models, and I shall only use French girls to work. I'm going to bring them over. I've secured them all, and they're going to live in the house, and I'm going to make my fortune. But I'm not going to make it by selling one bonnet a week to my personal friends. I'm going to have the smartest, most up-to-date, most popular bonnet-shop in London, because my millinery is going to be like your cream and butter—the very best to be had for money or otherwise."

"My lady," said ma, "you're starting on the right track, and with the right ideas to make success. I know what building up a big business means. It can be done, but not lightly or unadvisedly. In the words of the Psalmist, you must rise up early and late, take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness. Not, my lady, that you mustn't take your natural rest, but, on the other hand, you must give your whole mind, your whole heart to your business if you want to make it pay its way. I've heard a little of lady milliners—ladies of rank and position like yourself; they try to do two things at once, to live two lives. It's not to be done, my lady, not as a paying concern."

"But I am going to make that business pay, and pay well," said Lady Millicent, in a very emphatic tone.

"Not unless you regular lay yourself down to it, my lady," said ma, with equal decision.

"I must go into society to a certain extent, so

as to find my *clientèle*," said she. "But I am going to put my business first and foremost. I've got a good incentive, Mrs. Binks—I've a dear little girl I want to provide for beyond what I have already."

Ma softened at once. "I wish you the best of luck, my lady," she said. "And if to make my bonnets or my girls' hats would help you, I'll bring my custom to you with all my heart—such as it is, my lady, such as it is."

"Such as it is," cried Lady Millicent, shaking the tears back from her eyes and laughing gayly. "If this is one of your girls, why, I shall think out her hats with as much pleasure as I would for one of the young princesses. I'll let you know when the show is ready, Mrs. Binks, and you shall come across as a neighbor and see it without any obligation to spend a penny unless you really want to."

"Thank you very much indeed, my lady," said

ma. "But we'll come when all is quiet—out of regular business hours, if you please, for the same reason that I mentioned just now."

"Very well, Mrs. Binks; you shall have a private view all to yourself. There!"

After that we always got our hats and ma her bonnets of Lady Millicent; and when Rosalind was getting her *trousseau* ready, ma took her across and introduced her to Lady Millicent, and she got her hats there too. And the millinery business did well. You see, Lady Millicent, who was, as ma often said, "my lady" every inch of her, wasn't a bit stuck-up or haughty, but used to run across to ask ma's advice whenever she was a bit nonplused—"as one business woman of another, Mrs. Binks;" never gave herself airs, but made all her customers feel themselves welcome; and if, owing to that hint from ma, she kept herself mum as to what other customers she had, why, it pleased all parties and hurt nobody.

But my! How they did carry on at No. 30 'Astley Crescent, S. W.! Those rose-colored silk curtains, covered with white filmy lace ones, hid a lot that the outer world never suspected. The customers were not confined to ladies by any means. I've seen more than one gentleman that I knew well by sight and who carried H. R. H. in front of his name, drive up in a handsome little quiet brougham, and step gayly into No. 30, as if he was quite at home. It's true that the lady H. R. H.'s used to go too, very often, and many a time I've watched them with the opera-glasses, and seen them at tea in the large front drawing-room, where Lady Millicent showed her very best things—lovely hats and bonnets, a stock of rare old lace and a few of the latest Parisian novelties in tea gowns—*matinées* she always called them—and such-like things. I noticed that Lady Millicent always did all the show-work herself then, and that she served tea and everything with-

out once sitting down. But when the H. R. H. was a gentleman, she used to sit down just as if he was an ordinary gentleman, and generally she showed the hats and bonnets off on her own pretty head. I've seen a good many other things, too, but those I don't feel called upon to speak to. Lady Millacent Goode was a real friend to me in many ways, and, as ma often said, "What's never spoke can never be brought home."

So it can readily be understood that after a lively neighborhood like Astley Crescent, we did find Rosedale almost too ghastly quiet for words to tell. You see, Rosedale stood in a private road, a sort of side road well away from any of the main traffic. The house stood well back from the roadway, and was approached by a neat circular drive. It was so hidden by laurel and other shrubs that it was impossible to get even a glimpse of the entrance or lower windows from the road and equally impossible to get so much

as a glimpse of any passers-by from any of the sitting-room windows. It was all very well to call it delightfully private and retired, but after a road like a moving panorama, such as Astley Crescent, the deadly stillness was quite enough to drive any one silly.

"It's like being in chapel, isn't it?" said Polly to me, when we were getting up the next morning.

"Awful quiet," I replied.

"I dare say we shall get used to it," she said, philosophically. "If you remember, Anna Maria, when Lady Millicent first came to Astley Crescent, she used to complain so terribly of the distracting noise of the street. It's stylish to live in a quiet place like this. I shall make a point of always saying how delicious the delightful quiet is, so different to the roar of London streets."

"To the ceaseless roar of London streets," I corrected.

"No; not ceaseless," said Polly. "Lady Millicent did say ceaseless, it's true; but we don't want people here to think we came out of the Strand or Holborn."

How clever Polly was! She seemed to pick up every point as she went along, and to turn everything to her own advantage. I saw the things clear enough when she pointed them out to me, but I don't believe if I'd been left to myself that I should have made half the progress that I did through Polly.

As soon as the breakfast was over, ma went off to see to her new store-room, and Polly and me dressed ourselves and went out to look at the shops and explore the neighborhood a little. And what nice, smart girls we did see walking about, each with their dog and a stick, and some of them driving themselves in smart little pony-carts!

"How nice it will be when we get to know

them!" said Polly. "I wonder how soon they'll begin calling on us?"

"Not till we've been to chapel," I said.

"I shouldn't wonder if that's not just about the truth," said Polly.

But we had some callers before Sunday came round all the same. Rosalind had a cousin, not very long married, who lived only about half a mile from Rosedale, and that very afternoon she came driving up in a victoria, and sent in her cards as stylish as you please. Polly and me were in ma's bedroom when Elizabeth brought them in on a neat little waiter.

"'Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers,'" read Polly—
"'Mr. Joscelyn Smithers,' Where are they, Elizabeth?"

"The lady is in the drawing-room, miss. Shall I bring tea, m'm?"

"Tea?" said ma, doubtfully. Elizabeth was a parlor-maid we had engaged in the place, so ma

looked to her as knowing the right way better than she did. "Wouldn't you have cake and wine, Elizabeth?"

"They never does about here, m'm," said Elizabeth. "I think I'd better bring it in as they're used to hereabouts."

"Well, if you're sure you know, Elizabeth," said ma, still half hesitating.

"I'll bring it in, m'm, and the young ladies'll serve it," said Elizabeth, rather patronizingly.

"Why, oh, why didn't we ask Rosalind about this?" I muttered to Polly, as we followed ma downstairs.

"We shall find out for ourselves," answered Polly. "I'd rather any day pick up a wrinkle from Elizabeth than from Rosalind. Elizabeth won't always be our parlor-maid, but Rosalind will always be our sister-in-law."

CHAPTER V.

NEW-FANGLED WAYS.

“Everybody knows that ‘Pride is painful.’”

MRS. JOSCELYN SMITHERS was sitting in a big arm-chair in the very middle of the drawing-room, and she got up when we went in quite as if it was her house instead of ours.

“How do you do, Mrs. Binks? So pleased to welcome you to Norwood. Are these your daughters? My cousin Rosalind told me what charming girls you have. And my husband saw them at the wedding. I wasn’t there—no; in fact I was laid up with a severe cold, much to my regret.”

“Thank you. I’m very pleased to see you,” said ma.

"Won't you take a seat? Yes; these are my girls—Polly, the eldest, and Anna Maria."

"The baby of the family?" said Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers, with a laugh, as she stretched out a hand in a delicate pearl-gray glove to each of us in turn.

"Yes, I'm the baby," I said.

"And a very nice baby too," she rejoined, eyeing me up and down approvingly.

I tried not to look too conscious, and then Elizabeth created a diversion by coming in with a folded cloth in her hand. It was a cloth edged with lace, that ma had won in a raffle at Astley Chapel, but which we had never used, so far, as it seemed too smart for a tray cloth. She picked up the little table that stood near the door with the grandest air, and carried it across close to where Polly was sitting. Then she spread the cloth on it and disappeared, coming back a minute later with a little tray, smartly set out with

four of our best cups and saucers, the little silver tea-set that pa had given ma for her silver wedding present, and which she had never used since that day. She had also brought a little glass and silver dish with two compartments that had been another of ma's silver wedding presents, on one side of which she had put a little pile of rolled bread and butter and on the other some neat little wedges of rich plum cake.

Polly got up at once to do the honors of the tea-pot, and I saw her nervously clutch at the sugar-tongs and look towards Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers as if she was going to ask her if she took sugar or not.

"I'll hand the basin," I said in a whisper. I hadn't sat behind the curtains in Astley Crescent watching Lady Millicent and royalty with an opera-glass not to know that much.

So when Polly had poured out the tea and carried the first cup to Mrs. Smithers, I followed

with the sugar-basin and the little glass and silver dish.

"No sugar, thanks," said Mrs. Smithers, with an airy smile. "Yes; just a bit of your delightful-looking bread and butter."

At last, when the two ladies had exhausted the weather, the servant question, and the advantages of town against suburban residence, and after Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers had promised to make us known to some of the nicest people in the place, she put a question on an entirely different subject.

"And what chapel do you patronize, Mrs. Smithers?" she demanded.

"We go to the Congregational Church in Bathurst Road," Mrs. Smithers answered. "Mr. Sutton Wingfield is the pastor. I have already asked him to call on you. Most charming people. A divine preacher. I always tell him it is only his personal charm that keeps me from attending at the Church of England."

Ma stiffened all at once.

“My principles are more confirmed than that,” she said. “I could never bring myself to——”

“Well,” Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers interrupted, lightly, “it very much depends on what one’s social ambitions happen to be. There is an advantage in belonging to the Church of England, Mrs. Binks, and no dissenting body in the world ever quite makes it equal. However, as long as we stop in Norwood, and Mr. Wingfield remains pastor of the church in Bathurst Road, we shall make no change.”

Then she gayly took herself off to the victoria still standing at the gate. Ma came no further than the hall with her, but Polly and me went out to the gate. Elizabeth was out there talking to the coachman, and holding a large breakfast cup in her hand; and as we all came out the coachman flicked his livery over with his hand, after he had touched his hat to his mistress. Eliza-

beth put the cup down on the railings by the gate, and spread the light summer rug over Mrs. Joscelyn Smither's pretty gray dress, in the grandest way.

"Thank you," said she, with a haughty sort of bend of her head. "To Rosamunde Road." Then, with a last wave of her hand to us, the carriage moved off, and she was quickly out of sight.

Elizabeth stood for a second or two watching; then, with ever such a curious expression about the mouth, she turned back, picked up the cup and saucer, and went indoors.

"I'd give something to know as much as she knows," said Polly, as Elizabeth's black skirt disappeared. "We shall come to it, of course, but it's a bore having to find out as one goes along. Do you like her, Anna Maria?"

"Ye-es," I returned, doubtfully.

That's just how I feel. So patronizing. She's very stylish, though, isn't she?"

"Very, very stylish," I replied.

"Far more stylish than Rosalind even," Polly went on.

"But not like Lady Millicent," I declared. "I call Lady Millicent real stylish. Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers is a bit too fine. She kind of chews her words as if she'd got something in her mouth all the time. Still, she's nice and friendly in a way, and we shall get to know lots of people through her, I dare say."

"Oh, yes; we must take people as we find them," said Polly. "What a mercy it was Elizabeth knew all about the tea! Cake and wine would have done for us with a stylish woman like that. I can't think how it was we didn't know about tea. You see, ma was always stuck in that horrid shop, so that no one ever called on her as they do here. But Lady Millicent used to have tea going for a couple of hours every after-

noon. We ought to have known it was the right thing to have."

"It doesn't matter," said I. "We managed it all beautifully, I'm sure. Oh, Polly," I broke off short, "there is another visitor! It must be the pastor."

But it wasn't. No, it was a lady with a tall girl about seventeen with her, and when we went in, there was ma set in state again.

"These are my two girls, Mrs. Leynes," she said.

Mrs. Leynes held out a hand to us each in turn.

"My girl will be delighted to make their acquaintance," she said, with a gesture towards the tall girl, who was looking half nervously at us. "Myra has been abroad at school so very long that she has not many friends in Norwood yet."

Myra got up and shook hands with each of us, and then Elizabeth sailed in again with the tea-

tray freshly arranged, having left the little table with the lace-edged cloth where she had first set it. And then we went through the tea-serving process again, Polly pouring out a cup for ma and carrying it to her, after having served the visitors. Then we settled down to solemnly drinking our tea and eating little wedges of cake.

"Do you like your new home?" asked Myra Leynes shyly of us two.

"Oh, yes; we were charmed with it," said Polly.

"So deliciously quiet here," I chimed in.

"Too quiet, I think," she said, a little less shyly. "But, then, I've been five years in Paris, and Paris is very gay."

"And we've lived all our lives in London," cried Polly, with a laugh. "So that's why we like the quietness here."

Then she began to talk as girls do—asking did we like tennis, and did we play croquet.

"Well, we've only played when we've joined a club at the seaside," Polly replied.

"You ought to join the tennis club here."

"There is one?"

"Oh, yes; there are all sorts of clubs—tennis, amateur theatricals, singing, Browning, Shakespeare, and several other reading clubs. I belong to the Rossetti Club. I adore Rossetti."

I looked at Polly, and saw that she no better than I did what Rossetti meant.

And just then Mrs. Leynes got up to take her leave.

"Then good-bye, Mrs. Binks. I shall hope to see you and your daughters on Tuesday—that's my day. Good-bye—good-bye."

Ma followed her to the door, and Polly and me went further, as we had done with Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers. But Mrs. Leynes just put down some cards out of her case on the hall table, and passed out with a civil "good afternoon" to Elizabeth,

evidently not expecting us to have followed them at all. Elizabeth shut the door and passed into the drawing-room, reappearing a minute later with the tea-tray.

“Now, I wonder,” said Polly, as she stood fingering the cards—“I wonder why she left her cards as she went out, and Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers sent hers in by Elizabeth?”

“We shall find out by and by,” I said.

“Of the two I’d back Mrs. Leynes to know,” said Polly, thoughtfully.

“Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers had a carriage, and Mrs. Leynes walked,” I said.

“Yes; but Mrs. Leynes knows best,” said Polly, with conviction. She took the cards as she spoke, and read them. “Mrs. Frederick Leynes—Miss Leynes—Hawkhurst, Clifton Road, Norwood,” she said. “Mr. Frederick Leynes—Mr. Frederick Leynes—etc. You see, Anna Maria, we ought to have our names on ma’s cards like this.”

“And ma hasn’t even ordered any new cards yet,” I said, thinking how awkward it would be for ma to make return visits and to have no new cards to leave at the different houses. “Oh, ma,” I added, as ma came out of the drawing-room, “you ought to order new cards at once, or you won’t have any to leave when you return the visits. I can’t think why you didn’t order them ever so long ago.”

“Well, you see,” said ma, quite apologetically, “in business one doesn’t use cards above two or three times a year. I never gave it a thought. Oh, I do feel so—*What’s* that?”

“More company,” said Polly in a loud whisper. “Come and set down in the drawing-room.”

We had barely got settled in our different chairs, each with our hands before us doing nothing, when Elizabeth entered, announcing in a loud, distinct voice:

“Mr. Sutton Wingfield.”

Ma got up all in a flurry.

"I am very much pleased to see you, sir," she said. "It is extremely kind of you to come to honor us so soon."

"I am more than pleased to welcome you to Norwood, Mrs. Binks," said Mr. Wingfield, in very suave and fatherly accents. "My good friend, Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers, told me of your coming. A relative of yours, I think she told me."

"Not exactly that," said ma, "but of my son's wife. It was kind of her to make our coming known to you. I am sorry that my husband is not at home to receive you, sir. He will be honored to make your acquaintance."

"And I am sorry that my wife was not able to come with me to-day," said Mr. Wingfield. "She is quite prostrate with a violent headache. She is subject to them. But another day she will repair the omission, if you will allow her."

"I shall be only too glad whenever it is convenient to Mrs. Wingfield," said ma.

And then the door opened, and Elizabeth came marching in again with a fresh tea-tray, the little silver pot full of steaming tea, freshly rolled bread and butter on one side of the glass and silver dish, and a fresh little pile of neatly cut cake on the other.

Ma cast a glance of positive despair at Polly as she got up to pour out the tea, but Polly apparently did not see, and served us all alike, just as if we hadn't had any tea before. And so we sat round drinking tea and choking down our bits of cake, until at last, having made himself thoroughly pleasant and agreeable, Mr. Wingfield betook himself away.

"If I've got to go on drinking tea like this all the afternoon, it will be the death of me," said ma. "I'm that filled up, I feel fit to choke;"

and she laid her hand over her waist-buckle as if she had an oppression there.

"It's safest to have tea with them all until we make sure," said Polly. "You wouldn't like to offend any one, would you, ma, dear?"

"I wish I was back in Astley Crescent, that I do," said ma, miserably. "This going in for society is too much for me altogether. I'm that filled up I shan't be able to touch my regular tea at six o'clock, and if I go fasting right up to supper time I shall be faint for want. Three great cups of tea, and you filled them right up to the brim, Polly."

"Why didn't you leave half of it?" said Polly.

"And let people think my tea wasn't good? Not me. But I'm that filled up——"

"Have a little nip of brandy to settle it," said Polly.

"Brandy! In the afternoon?" echoed ma, still holding her hand gingerly over her waist. "Well,

it was a great teacher who said, 'Take a little wine for thy stomach's sake,' and I *will* have a tablespoonful of brandy, Polly, neat, in a wine-glass."

CHAPTER VI.

HINTS.

"It's hard when you come to four cross-roads, and there's no sign-post."

WE were quite nonplused when it came to ordering ma's new cards. It was easy enough to write on the paper of instructions, "Mrs. Joseph Binks," and in the lower left-hand corner, "Rose-dale, Cathcart Avenue, Norwood." But it was another matter when it came to deciding about our names. Ought ma to put "Miss Binks—Miss Anna Maria Binks," "Miss Mary Binks—Miss Anna Maria Binks," or "The Misses Binks?"

It was no use looking at Mrs. Leynes's card. On that was written, or rather printed, "Mrs. Frederick Leynes—Miss Leynes." That did not help us, for Mrs. Leynes had spoken of Myra as

"my only girl." Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers was too young a woman to have daughters old enough to go visiting.

"So what are we to do?" asked Polly, in despair.

"Ask Rosalind," said ma.

"Not Rosalind," said Polly, with decision; and I knew why. Rosalind wouldn't know. Her mother was dead, and she had cards of her own.

"I know," I cried. "Get a book that'll tell us all about those things."

"That's a good idea," said Polly. "I wonder if we could get one in Norwood, or whether we had better send to town for it?"

"Send to town," said I, promptly. "I wouldn't let any one in Norwood know that we had any need of such a thing."

"I ought to be able to remember from when I lived with Lady Anna," said ma; "but somehow, I don't believe I noticed such things one way

or another." And then she sighed, and said: "I don't think society will suit me; but I suppose I must go through with it for the sake of you girls."

"Oh, yes, ma! It will be easy enough when once we're in it," said Polly, lightly.

Ma shook her head as if it would never be easy to her to go on drinking one cup of tea after another as she had done that afternoon; but Polly had promised to bear it in mind, and only give her a small half-cup each time, and so she wouldn't find her own hospital too trying.

And the next morning Polly and me dressed early, and went off to Astley Crescent to see if everything was straight for Ted and Rosalind to come home to; and then Polly suggested that we should go off to the Brompton Road to find a good bookseller's shop, where she might get a book that would help us out of our difficulties about ma's cards.

She was a cool one, was Polly. She marched in as bold as brass, and says :

“ Oh, I want a small book for keeping addresses in.”

“ Certainly, madam,” said the young man. “ Perhaps this is what you require?” As he spoke he held out a little book about three inches by five, with a limp cover, on which “ Where is it?” was printed in gold.

Polly looked at it rather doubtfully.

“ This is very small,” she said.

“ I have them much larger, madam,” said he ; and thereupon produced a similar book of about twice the size.

Polly asked the price, and then said she would have it.

“ Have you any books on—on visiting and arranging weddings and such like?” she inquired next.

I felt myself going as red as beetroot, but Polly

was perfectly cool and unconcerned. The young gentleman pondered for a minute with an air as if she had asked for a book on the management of negro babies, and then, with an elaborate air of sudden enlightenment, he said:

“Do you mean a book of etiquette, madam?”

“Yes. Please show me one,” said Polly.

That was what I admired in Polly. She could be so haughty when she liked. No one, to look at her at that moment, would have imagined that she had ever been in a shop, except as a customer, in all her life. The young gentleman stepped back, and then returned, bringing several small-looking books with him, which he put on the counter in front of Polly.

“This is by the Honorable Evelyn MacSlush,” he said, putting one into my sister’s hand.

Polly turned over the leaves with a critical air.

“To put your knife into your mouth is a great sol—sol—solecism,” she read under her

breath. "Horrid bad manners, I call it," she muttered; then put the book down and took up one of the others.

"There has been a great run on that," said the young gentleman, as Polly turned over the leaves of the second book.

"'Hints to a Novice in Society,'" read Polly. "See, Anna Maria, this gives all about both weddings and christenings and drawing-room teas and bazaars. It will tell just what we want. The price? Three and six. Then I'll take it."

"It's a very small book for three and six, Polly," I said, as we walked away down the road.

"That doesn't matter. It will tell us all we most want to know, and that's the main thing," Polly rejoined. "It looked to me full of all sorts of valuable information. That's the worst of having to take it all up new. Poor dear ma's gone stodging on in the business so long that

she's forgot all she ever knew of such little matters."

How clever it was of Polly to assume that, of course, ma *had* known all about cards and afternoon tea and the proper way to do everything! I admired Polly more than I have any words to tell.

We got back to Rosedale just as the dinner-bell was ringing.

"No pa again?" said Polly.

"No; he had to run down to the farm," said ma, as she seated herself at the head of the table. "He's been talking to me this morning, girls, and he says, come what will, he must have his dinner in the evening. I'm sure I don't know how it will agree with him, uprooting all his habits at his time of life."

"Lor', ma, you talk as if pa was dead old!" cried Polly. "If it suits him better to have his dinner at eight instead of his supper at nine, why shouldn't he have it?"

"Tea at six and dinner at eight!" cried ma.

"Not at all. Tea at four o'clock, just a tray in the drawing-room if there's comp'ny, or in the boodore if we're alone; and then dinner at eight, and a biscuit later on if you feel a want."

Ma shook her head; and just then Elizabeth came in with the soup-tureen, and stood ready to whip the plates off one by one as fast as ma filled them, so that we could not say anything more about it.

She was in and out of the room all the time, so that we hadn't a chance of any private talk as long as the meal lasted. Then, when I did think we were rid of her, she looked at ma and said:

"Shall I serve coffee here or in the boodore, m'm?"

"Coffee!" Ma's jaw fairly dropped.

"You'll take coffee, m'm, won't you?" Elizabeth asked. "Cook has prepared it."

"Oh, yes; here—here, Elizabeth," said ma.



"OH, GIRLS, GIRLS, I WISH I WAS BACK IN ASTLEY CRESCENT, IN MY OWN COMFORTABLE SHOP."—Page 85

There was a little coffee-pot to ma's silver set, and Elizabeth set first three cups and saucers, then the little silver coal-pan and scoop that we used for sifted sugar, and finally set the decanter with the brandy and the silver coffee-pot just in front of ma.

Ma did not speak till the door had closed behind the girl.

"Are we—I mean, can't we have any milk to it!" ma asked piteously.

"Try it without," said Polly. "If it isn't the thing, it's better to get used to it right away."

"It's horrid!" ma burst out. "Oh, girls, girls, what were we thinking of to come out here and upset all our habits and make ourselves miserable, especially at my time of day? I wish I was back in Astley Crescent, in my own handsome, comfortable shop! Yes; that I do—that I do!"

"Nay, ma," said Polly; "don't take on like

that! What's the good of you and pa being rich if you had to stay stuck at business all your days, with never a bit of pleasure in your lives? It's a bit strange to you just at first, living private, when you've been used to putting business before everything; but, after all, as we've bought the house and settled down in it, it's best to begin right from the very beginning. We shall soon get used to the new ways, ma, dear; and you wouldn't like to live different to all the people round about?"

"I suppose not," said ma, drearily. Then she sat back in her high chair and let her eyes wander round the handsome room, and the table set out as if we were going to have a party. "I suppose not. I've lived well all these years, and kept a good table; but you've got to be born to using your best things every day, and having a frilled-up girl watching every morsel you put into your mouth, and a-listening to every word you let drop.

I wasn't born to it, Polly, and it's like purgatory to me."

Polly was silent. She was devotedly fond of ma, was Polly, and she looked real scared at this new ma, so unlike her own calm, quiet, resolute mother, who had ruled over Astley Crescent like a queen. I think for once Polly had nothing to say.

Then ma suddenly sat up, and began to pour out the coffee into the little cups.

"There! I didn't ought to have said that," she said. "It isn't like me to repine. I've put my hand to the plow that you girls may get on and marry well, and I'll not look back—at least not yet. If I've got to drink coffee that's as black as ink and as bitter as gall to help my children on in the world, why I'll do it as part of the price. There, girls, forget that your poor mother was weak and silly, and pined for her old life back again. As you said just now, Polly, we shall get used to it after a bit."

We all drank our milkless coffee, and then we went into ma's little boudoir, and Polly brought out the two books she had bought in the morning. Ma didn't take much interest in them, but dropped off to sleep in her easy-chair.

And, would you believe it, though we turned that wretched book over from cover to cover, the one point on which we were most anxious for information was not to be found! There were chapters on manners in society, on sending out and answering invitations, on dinner-parties and on cards and card-leaving, but not one word as to how the daughters' name should be put on the mother's cards.

"Of course," one part of the card-leaving chapter ran, "your chaperon will write your name in pencil under hers." "If your father is a widower," another sentence said, "your name must be printed on his visiting cards (underneath his name); and his card, in this case, must be

the size of a lady's card instead of a gentleman's."

This was all very well, but it didn't help us a bit. Knowing what a girl would do if she hadn't a ma did not help us to decide whether we ought to put "Miss Binks," or "Miss Mary Binks"—"Miss Anna Maria Binks," or the "Misses Binks." Really, it was aggravating!

On one point, however, the book was very positive, which was that no girl ought or could be allowed to have a visiting card of her own. That certainly would be to finish one right off in anything like select circles. And yet that very afternoon, just as we were thinking we might as well go out for a walk, a grand carriage dashed up the drive, and a footman in white-and-red livery jumped and rang the bell as if he wanted to tear the wire out of the wall.

"Mrs. Binks at 'ome?" he asked; and as Eliza-

beth said "yes," he turned and flung the carriage-door open.

"'Ere, James," said the lady, "give the girl the cards, for I'm sure to forget 'em as I come out."

"Yes, 'm," said he, touching his hat.

I could hear every word, for the boudoir window was open, and the lace curtains completely hid me from sight.

"Mind you've given enough, James," said she, in the same imperative tone. "And two of Miss Potts's cards for the young ladies. Yes; now your arm."

As we went through the hall to the drawing-room, Polly and me stopped to see what her name was. There were ten or eleven cards lying on the carved oak table.

MRS. THEODORE POTTS,
The Mansion.

MR. THEODORE POTTS,
The Mansion.

MISS POTTS,
The Mansion.

MISS EMMY POTTS,
The Mansion.

MR. ERNEST POTTS,
The Mansion.

“And a carriage and pair like that!” said Polly. “Anna Maria, how are we to make head or tail of it?”

CHAPTER VII.

A GOOD START.

“It is possible from a corner to look up to heaven.”

IF ever three and six was thrown clean away, it was over that horrid book, “Hints to a Novice in Society.” It was cram full of all sorts of hints, it is true, but it never contained information on any particular point such as we happened to want. For instance, we wanted especially to know whether ma ought to return her visits alone, or whether Polly or me, or both, ought to go with her, but not one word on the subject did the idiotic “Hints” give. It told us that a young girl ought to go into a drawing-room with a sweet smile on her face, and that she must, if she wished to make herself popular, take particular care to

devote herself to shy young girls or lonely old ladies. Now, it wasn't likely that Polly and me would think of walking into a room with our tongues sticking out or with an *un*-pleasant expression on our faces.

As to lonely old ladies, we hadn't seen any so far. Mrs. Potts was the only old lady who had called, and she wasn't the kind of a person a young girl could patronize and put at her ease—far from it. Indeed, Polly and me both found ourselves, so far as we understood society in Norwood, very much in the position of the shy young girl mentioned in “Hints.”

But though we searched the “Hints” through and through, we could find not one word to help us out of the dilemma.

“I think,” said ma, at last, “that we can't do better than take pattern by Mrs. Leynes. She's so very stylish—quite the lady in every way. She brought her daughter with her, so I'll take Polly.

Three's rather a handful to walk into a room at once."

So Polly went with ma to return the call. At least she went with her to call on Mrs. Joscelyn Smithers; but the next day, when ma was going to Mrs. Leynes's she was fixed to the house with a shocking cold, so ma took me instead.

I must say ma did look nice. She'd a handsome black silk gown trimmed with lace and jet, a little black lace mantle over her shoulders, and that was all sparkling with jet too. And on her head she had one of Lady Millicent's very best bonnets—the one she had bought new for our Ted's wedding. It was a pretty bonnet that, and well worth the four guineas Lady Millicent had charged her for it (at a special price, for five guineas was the original figure). It was entirely of jet, with masses of yellow mimosa all over the front, and a high white aigrette standing straight up like a soldier's plume. Pa had lunched at home

that day, and he looked her over approvingly when she came down dressed to go out.

"My! Old Lady, but you do look a swell!" he cried.

"Nay, Binks; don't tease me," said ma.

"Tease you, my dear! Nay, but I mean it," he replied. "I don't know any man whose missis can 'old a candle to you this minute. You were always a good-looking woman, old lady, but you're like every other woman living, you look all the better for a good setting."

Ma flushed up, and smithered her handsome gown quite nervously.

"Binks," she said, "the worst of it is I *can't* get used to wearing my best things every day, that I can't."

"You've got a right to, if ever a woman had in this world," he said bluntly. "You helped to earn 'm. 'As for this young popinjay," he went on, pinching my ear and then giving my hair a

good tug, "she'll never think twice about wearing her best clothes, I'll warrant."

"No, pa," I said, laughing.

"Ah, well, you'll always be able to have clothes and to spare," he said half sadly. "All I'm afraid of is that you mayn't put 'igh enough value on yourself. Always remember, my girl, that even if your father's a plain business man, and your mother spent most of her life helping him in the shop, that between 'em they built up a business that will make you and your sister able to pick and choose when you come to think about husbands."

"I never mean to make myself cheap, pa," I replied, tossing my head.

He looked very hard at me for a minute before he spoke.

"Well, I 'ope to Heaven you never will. It wouldn't be like a Binks to throw away a good chance or the substance for the shadder. So don't

get reading too many tom-fool story-books, my girl, such as teach you that all the men with money are likely to hide you half your time, and that all the fellers with eyes like saucers and in sad want of a barber 'll make you 'appy ever after. When your time comes, see that you get hold of a straight, honest feller that can provide for you apart from which you'll have from me, and you'll satisfy your mother and me as our Ted satisfied us when he picked out Rosalind."

"I'll keep it in mind, pa," I said, as I set my big hat straight by the big pier-glass.

I couldn't help laughing to myself to think how unnecessary it was for pa to preach me a little sermon on such a subject. No, if ever a girl had a proper sense of her own value, that girl was me, Anna Maria Binks. I couldn't see the sense of love in a cottage at all. It only means a nasty little place full of damp and draughts, with one little dirty-faced girl, or perhaps no help at all. It

means a wife always grubbing after the dinner and botching at her own clothes ; it means skimping the butter and never having cream, and not daring to buy new-laid eggs, but having to content one's self with " fresh " ones a month old ; it means back seats in chapel and mended finger-ends ; it means tramping along to save a bus, and never daring to think of a cab ; it means inferior cuts at the butcher's, and living in a bad neighborhood. And, besides these, it means everything squalid and horrid, everything screwed and nipped to the last point ; it means social ruin, for who can get on in society without money ? It means the end and death of ambition, for who can hope to improve themselves one way or another if they've got to be reckoning halfpennies all the days of their life ? No ; no love in a cottage for me ! When I marry I want a house at least as handsome as Rosedale. I want a victoria of my own, and a brougham for wet days and night-

work. I want a maid and a boudoir, and a white Maltese poodle, washed and combed every day, with a parting right down his back showing all his pretty pink skin, and a silver collar with a ring of bells round his neck; and one doesn't get these things with love in a cottage. I remember reading a story once in the *Family Novelist*. It started quite pretty about a young girl who was governess in a nobleman's family, and everybody fell in love with her because of her beauty and her high-bred grace. Her father had been a poor minister, her mother an actress. She was slight and fair, with great eyes like wood violets set in fringes black as midnight; a sweet mouth like Cupid's bow; a dear little straight nose; and masses of waving hair like the setting sun (I suppose it meant carrot). Of course, the nobleman's son and all his friends home from college fell in love with her; but she was true to her own lover, a struggling literary gentleman living in

a garret in London on about twopence-halfpenny a day (which meant only having a clean collar about once a week, you know), working to make a name for her.

The rich young man offered her diamonds and everything that money could buy; but the girl with hair like the setting sun set her face like a stone, and steadfastly refused him.

"Diamonds!" she murmured. "What are diamonds beside my own love's dear blue turquoises?" And then she kissed the poor little ring that Lionel Trevor had denied himself food to buy as a pledge of his eternal and undying love; and tears stood in the sweet violet eyes, as the dew of morning pearls or the sweet wild violets in the hedgerows.

Now, isn't it rubbish? As if any girl in her senses would ask, "What are diamonds?" 'As if any girl in her ordinary senses would refuse a lord's son *and* diamonds for the sake of a poor

thing setting scribbling in a garret, who had to go without butter and other things for weeks that he might spend seventeen-and-six over a little blue ring in some pawn-shop. It isn't even ordinary common sense. I could understand a rich girl like Miss Eames—Eames's Food, you know—marrying the minister of their chapel, as she did. She had such a lot of money that she didn't want any more, and he was Mark Andrew Dane, whose name was known as a preacher all over England. To be Mrs. Mark Andrew Dane was something, and as she herself thought so, she was quite right to have him if she wanted. Mrs. Mark Andrew Dane isn't like most popular ministers' wives, who, however popular their husbands happen to be have to suck up to their congregations. She doesn't care a dump what the congregation thinks. She has bigger diamonds and smarter carriages, and more sables and servants than any of them, and they spend their time

sucking up to her instead of her sucking up to them. But marrying like that is different to upsetting all one's family by giving one's self way cheap, perhaps to a little clerk with eighty pounds a year, and have to wear a black coat all the week. *That* certainly ain't good enough—at least, not for me.

Mrs. Leynes's house was only two roads away from us. We found it quite easily—a large, handsome villa, nearly as nice as Rosedale, with a red lamp over the drive-gate, and a neat brass plate, with "Mr. Leynes, Surgeon," engraved upon it, on the gate-post. We went up the drive and rang at the bell, which was answered at once by a parlor-maid, just after the same pattern as our Elizabeth. She replied to ma's question as to whether Mrs. Leynes was at home by flinging the door as wide open as it would go. I felt just as I always feel in some of the West End drapery shops, when a young lady, dressed in trailing black silk, like a duchess, comes sailing up, and

makes you feel as if you'd crept in without leave. Ma, however, never seemed to feel that. To her a servant was a servant except at meals. Then they worried her.

She followed Mrs. Leynes's maid across the entrance-hall to a room at the back of the house. Then she stopped with her hand on the knob of the door, and said, "What name shall I say, ma'am?"

"Mrs. Binks," said ma, holding tight on to her new silver card-case.

Then the girl flung open the door, and said in a very loud, sharp voice:

"Mrs.—and—Miss—BINKS."

There seemed to be quite a buzz of voices when the door opened, but they hushed as if by magic as ma and I went into the room. It was a long room, with a door opening into a conservatory at one side, and at the end a large window looking into the garden.

Mrs. Leynes came forward to meet us. "So

pleased to see you," she said cordially. "How do you do, dear? Myra, here is Miss Binks. Come and sit by me, Mrs. Binks. Let me make you known to my sister, Mrs. Frayling. Mrs. Hammond, this is a quite near neighbor of yours, Mrs. Binks, who has just come to Rosedale."

Ma disappeared, as it were, among these ladies, leaving me standing by Myra. She, however, soon set me at my ease.

"I have to keep by the tea-table," she said; "so do come and sit by me. Mother hates tea brought in poured out as some people have it, but when she has a room full, it keeps one very busy, I can tell you. How is your sister? Why didn't she come?"

I gathered from this that ma could well have brought us both if she had liked. After that I began to see that Polly had not wasted the three-and-six she gave for "Hints." I remembered one passage—"When once you have mastered the laws of etiquette, you will never be in doubt

what to do, and the embarrassment you suffer from now will all pass away. Ease of manner is not attained by carelessness, but by knowledge. Knowledge is power in society as elsewhere."

There was sound common sense in that. Now I knew that ma could take us both about with her, so I and Polly wouldn't feel shy when we went into strange rooms. "Hints" was quite right—knowledge *is* power.

Myra Leynes carried a cup of tea to ma, and then took the cake-dish to her. I saw that Elizabeth had been quite right when she had set out our tea-table, but the Leyneses had a much larger tea-service, and the tray was silver too, and had a picture in the middle of a bird standing on a little bar, and then words I couldn't read underneath. Of course, I only caught a glimpse of the picture on the tea-tray, and I shouldn't have known what it was if I hadn't seen the same little thing like a trade mark on the tea-spoon in my

saucer. I determined to look in "Hints" and see why some people had letters and some people had little pictures on their tea-spoons.

More and more people kept coming in, and a few went out, but not many, and the room got fuller and fuller, and poor Myra got busier and busier, until at last I said:

"Can't I hand that cake-dish round for you?"

"Oh, do; There's a dear," in a tone of relief.

So I started round with the cake-dish, and everybody spoke to me, and said, "Oh, thank you, dear," as if I had done something wonderful. I thought of "Hints" again. "Do not under-rate yourself, my young reader. A bright young face is always welcome, especially if you behave so as to be an assistance to your hostess instead of an inconvenience." I felt that Mrs. Leynes and every one was pleased I had handed the cake, and I made up my mind I would study "Hints" till I knew every word of it by heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

“Adversity tries friends as *aqua fortis* tries gold.”

WE found Polly very poorly when we got home, and that same evening ma sent for Dr. Leynes, whom we hadn't seen when we called in the afternoon. He came round in about a quarter of an hour. And my word, if Mrs. Leynes was stylish, so was he—a very tall, fair man, clean-shaved and thin, with hair just growing gray, and a pair of coldish gray eyes. He was in evening dress, too, only with a short jacket instead of a cut-away coat.

If he looked cold, his manner was kind enough for any one.

"I hope it is nothing serious, Mrs. Binks," he said, taking ma's hand and holding it just as if he'd known her all her life.

"Well, I hope not, doctor," says ma. "My eldest girl has been ailing all day, and she seems very hot and restless to-night, so I thought I'd rather make quite sure by sending for you early."

"And quite right too. And will you let me see her?" he said.

"Come this way, doctor," said ma.

I followed them softly. I was trembling all over, for I felt Polly was going to be very ill. 'And Polly was my only sister, my best friend. Much as I loved pa and ma and the three boys, it was Polly that had my heart, it was Polly I simply adored.

I really loved the doctor for the way in which he went into the room and walked quietly up to the bed.

Well, young lady, you've sent for me very

early after taking possession of your nice new house. What's amiss?" he asked.

"I don't know, doctor," said Polly; "but I feel very bad."

He asked a few questions, listened to her chest through an instrument fixed to his ears, and then took her temperature.

"I'll send you something round in a few minutes," he said, soothingly. "And you must try to keep as quiet as you can, and drink nothing but milk, with a little sodawater in it."

"I'm thirsty," said Polly.

"Yes, I dare say. Milk and soda will quench your thirst better than anything. I'll look in early in the morning and see how you are. Probably it will all have passed away by then."

He bade her "Good night," and went out of the room, ma and me following him.

"Mrs. Binks," he asked, as we reached the hall, "what kind of general health has she?"

"Splendid—couldn't be better," said ma. "I've never known her to ail a thing since she had the measles and the whooping-cough."

"H'm!" He passed his finger and thumb over his chin, as a man often does when he is thinking hard.

"Is it anything serious, doctor?" asked ma, in a very quavering voice.

"It may pass off in the night—it may be half a dozen things," he said, guardedly. Then he looked at ma, and said abruptly: "Mrs. Binks, where do you get your milk from?"

Ma gave a sort of moan and flung up her hands.

"I knew it—I knew it!" she cried; then turned and ran back into the boudoir, where pa was set reading the evening paper. "Binks—Binks!" she cried, "didn't I say I had my doubts about that there milk? There's the doctor asking where we get it."

"Is Polly very ill?" pa asked, all in a fright.

"No, no; but she has symptoms that may develop into something by morning," Dr. Leynes answered for her. "We doctors are very inquisitive fellows, you know, Mr. Binks, and we like collateral evidence all the time as we go along."

"Well, doctor," said pa, "I need 'ardly tell you that my wife and me haven't built up a big concern like Binks and Sons without knowing pretty well what milk is. We don't happen to serve this district, and perhaps that was one reason why I bought this 'ouse, thinking my girls would have a better chance if we didn't. I'll open a branch in Norwood to-morrow."

"And to-night?" ma cried quite wildly. "Dr. Leynes has ordered her naught but milk, Binks."

"I'll go up to South Kensington and fetch a canful; that'll serve the night," said pa. "And till we get established, they must send over night and morning. Don't worry about that, old lady."

I only 'ope Polly ain't going to suffer for my bit of paltry pride."

The doctor clapped his hand down on pa's broad shoulder.

"I know all about Binks and Sons," he said, "and shall be glad to see you showing this neighborhood the way round. As for pride, I wouldn't give that a thought. The world is very sensible nowadays, and people mostly take the positions they're suited to."

"If only my girl don't suffer," said poor ma, with trembling lips.

"Well, Mrs. Binks, if it does turn to something, we must do the best we can for her," he said, kindly. "I won't conceal from you that something more may come. A girl does not have a temperature of a hundred and four for nothing. But I'll come first thing in the morning."

Our poor Polly did suffer. Ma never left her that night, not for a minute. She had one of the

spare beds made up for me, and she insisted on my going to bed while she kept watch. And in the morning Polly was worse.

Life after that was nothing more than a hideous dream for weeks and weeks. The house was entirely given over to illness, with two nurses from a great nursing home in town, the doctor coming in and out all day long, the door-knocker tied up, and straw laid a foot deep all along the road.

We found out who were our friends then. 'At the very first breath of what it was—diphtheria—Rosalind came flying over from Astley Crescent.

"Oh, my poor dear ma!" she said, catching hold of mother and holding her tight—"my poor dear ma! What can I do to help you?"

"Oh, my dear, you shouldn't have come!" ma cried; "Ted shouldn't have let you. Go home, my dear girl; go home and pray for us—it's all you can do."

“Nay,” said Rosalind, stoutly, “I’ve come to stop, ma. Ted’s quite willing I should. There must be lots to do, and plenty of ways in which I can save you. Lor’, *I’m* not afraid! I never catch anything.”

And stay she did, and the greatest comfort she was to poor ma and all of us, always bright and cheerful, always kind and tender with our poor Polly, who went very nigh indeed to the gates of heaven—so close that several times we fairly held our breath, thinking that she was so dazzled by the radiance from within that she must leave go of our loving hands and slip past the golden portals forever.

Mrs. Leynes came every day, always alone, for, as she said, she had fears for her only girl, though none for herself. And then there came one bright July afternoon when the doctor was in and out every hour, when she came and sat on the sofa by ma, and held her hand, and said all sorts of

tender, motherly things, with the tears streaming down her cheeks. And poor ma was simply frozen, and couldn't shed a single tear.

"I know what you are trying to tell me, Mrs. Leynes," she said at last. "I saw what the doctor meant this morning. He told you to try to break it to me. He's give up hope. I know it."

"No, Mrs. Binks," said she, "my husband *never* gives up hope while there is life. Your poor girl is very, very ill; there's no denying it; but it is the misery in your face that breaks me down like this, not anything my husband has said."

"Dear, kind friend," said ma, putting out her hand, but otherwise keeping that same horrid calm, "pray for me; it's all you can do now. I've prayed myself till I seem to be dazed, and the Lord don't seem as if he meant to listen."

"He will—He will," cried Mrs. Leynes, hopefully.

We knew that the next few hours must decide it one way or another. What a day it was! What an evening! What a night! Dr. Leynes was there most of the time after midnight, and the two nurses never stirred out of the room. Rosalind never left them, and Ted came and sat with pa, who alternately prayed and reproached himself with his pride, now being so heavily punished. Poor pa! If ever such a punishment was undeserved, it was in his case, and so Ted told him over and over again.

“Don’t take on like that, gov’nor,” I heard him say in a queer, husky voice. “It was an accident, pure and simple. Even if you were dead sure of it’s having come from the milk——”

“I am dead sure,” said pa, wretchedly. “And Leynes, he’s dead sure too. I’ve gone str’ight on a hard-and-fast principle all my business life, and then go and break it, to the risk of my own flesh and blood.”

"She might have got it any time—at the sea-side, or anywhere."

"She might, but she didn't," cried pa, savagely.

"She got it through her father's pride and folly; and if she goes—if she goes——"

"She isn't going," said Ted, doggedly.

And Polly didn't go! Toward dawn there was just a slight change for the better, and then Rosalind came down with ma, and the doctor behind them. He never said a word, but walked up to the sideboard, and mixed a glass of stiff brandy and water.

"Drink this, Mrs. Binks," he said, holding it to her lips.

"Yes; drink it, ma, dear," said Rosalind.

"I can't," said poor ma. Her face was quivering and her lips were white and her chin trembled so that her teeth chattered loudly.

Pa started up out of his chair; he thought it was all over.

"Come, come," said the doctor, with cheery firmness, "you musn't give way now—or rather, you may give way all you know. If you can have a good cry, you'll be all the better for it."

Ma looked up piteously.

"Doctor," she said in a whisper, "I—I——"

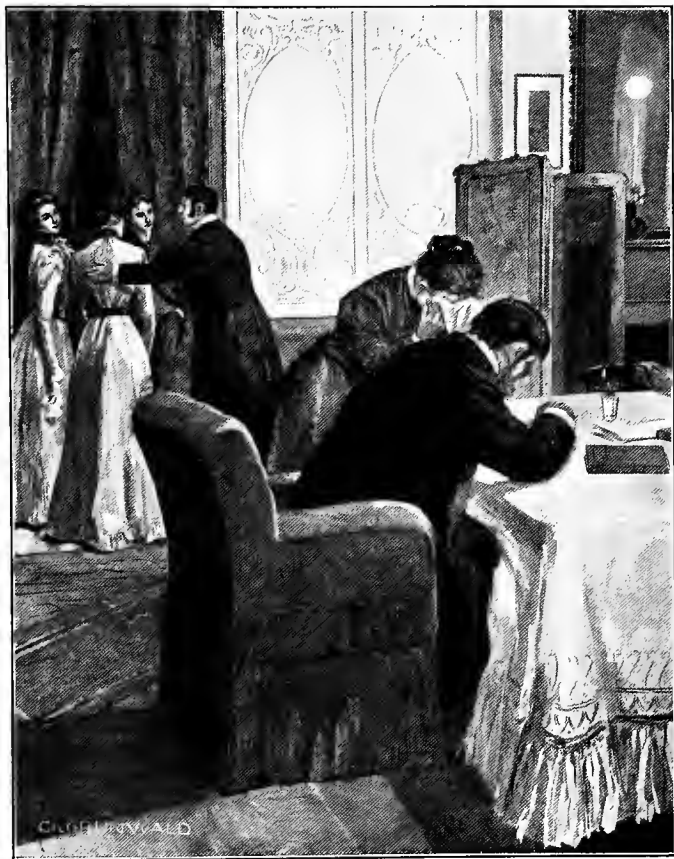
"Yes, I know. We've had about the nearest squeak for it that I have ever seen; but she's got youth and strength and devoted nurses to pull her round. There's every chance now."

"Then she's not—not——" began pa.

"Not a bit of it," the doctor returned. "A distinct turn for the better, and she is sleeping quite naturally and peacefully for the first time since her illness began."

"Thank God! My God, I thank Thee," pa cried.

Then he made a step toward ma, stopped, and dropped into a chair, flinging his arms out on to the table, and hiding his face upon them.



"THE DOCTOR TUMBLED US ALL OUT OF THE ROOM WITHOUT CEREMONY."—Page 119

Ted got up and put his arm over him.

"Don't take on so, gov'nor," he said. "Think of all poor mother's gone through."

But pa sobbed on, and ma got up and went to him, and put her hand into his.

"Don't, Binks," she said.

And then, somehow, he got his arm round her, and she began to cry too, with her head upon his shoulder. The doctor tumbled us all out of the room without ceremony.

"Now, Mrs. Edward," he said, as he closed the door behind us, "get this damsel off to bed, and then go to bed yourself with a clear conscience. Your wife's a brick, sir," he added, holding out his hand to Ted. "Take care of her, for you'll never get another like her."

"But——" began Rosalind, looking toward the dining-room door.

"Leave them to themselves," said Dr. Leynes. "The longer they sob there the better it will be

for both of them. Upon my word, I don't wonder they are both broken down. It was a near shave, and no mistake about it."

"But you've had nothing yourself, doctor," said Ted.

"I'll get something at home," said he.

"Let me get you a cup of hot soup," put in Rosalind. "Cook's sitting up in case anything might be wanted, and she has it all hot and ready for use, I know."

"Then take me to the kitchen to get it," said he, cheerfully. "I'm never above a cup of good, strong soup when it's going. Which is the way?"

He was a wonderful man, that doctor, so high and mighty one couldn't have said "no" to anything he might choose to say, and yet with it such a friendly, half-ordering, familiar kind of way that one couldn't feel a bit offended. He went into the big, clean kitchen that evening and drank two cups of cook's strong soup, telling her it had

made him feel a man again, and that she had better take a cup of it herself and then go off to bed, as the worst was all over. And then he went off home by the side entrance, so as not to make a noise ; and then Rosalind made me go to bed, too, and I was asleep as soon as my head had touched the pillow.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HIGHER DEPARTMENT.

"No one takes illness so badly as those who have never known a day's ill health."

THAT illness of Polly's made a new creature of pa. He never was quite the same again. You see, in all his life before he had never had to reckon much with illness. As children we were all strong and well, ma never ailed anything beyond a bad cold now and again; and pa himself had never known what it was to have a single day's illness. So Polly's fight at close quarters with death seemed to open out an entirely new set of ideas to him. He grew nervous and anxious about us all, and used to get into a perfect fever every time one of us looked a little pale or had even a slight headache. As soon as Polly

was out of danger he had all the drains overhauled, but they were in the most perfect condition; and at last, after infinite pains, the cause of Polly's illness was traced to a cow suffering from what they believed to have been diphtheria, at one of the farms from which the dairy, which served us, drew its supply of milk. As soon as a whisper of diphtheria, and milk as its possible cause, had crept out into the neighborhood, this animal had instantly been slaughtered and its carcass destroyed, so that positive evidence was not to be had. But both pa and Dr. Leynes were satisfied that milk was at the bottom of it, and a splendid new milk-shop was being got ready in the best part of the village, with the name "Binks and Sons" painted over the windows.

"My pride has cost me dear, doctor," said pa, "and might have cost me dearer. But it's killed for all time. I haven't a shadow of it left."

"You ought to be proud of such a business as

yours," said Dr. Leynes. "I know I should be if it were mine."

"I am—I am," cried pa. "But I thought if we were to live private, we might as well go outside the shadow of the shop. But it's cured me, doctor; it's cured me."

"That's right," said the doctor, clapping him on the back. "We can't all of us be too thankful that things have gone as they have and not as they might have done. For my own part, Mr. Binks, I'd rather have anything on my hands than a case of diphtheria. We don't know much about it yet, we doctors, though, mind you, the day won't be far distant when they'll hold it in the hollow of the hand, and dread it no more than the measles. But though the *savants* are on the track, they haven't got there yet.

As soon as she was fit to travel, we all went down to Eastbourne with Polly. We took one of the nurses with us, and we had a spare room, so

that Ted and Rosalind could run down every week—which they did every Saturday afternoon, staying till Monday morning. And there by the sea Polly soon picked up her roses again, and got strong and well as any one, even pa and ma, could wish. It was the beginning of October before we went home again, and I think we were all very glad to be together again, for pa didn't like Eastbourne any better than he had liked Margate years before, or any of the other seaside places where we had spent our summer holidays in the years between.

The very first day after we got back pa got ma to go to town with him to buy something—he wouldn't say what. Then, two or three days afterwards, their purchases came home—a big silver tankard for Dr. Leynes and a diamond ring for Rosalind.

On the tankard was engraved as follows:

TO

FREDERICK LEYNES, ESQUIRE,

A TOKEN OF DEEP GRATITUDE

FROM

JOSEPH BINKS.

"There, now, do you think the doctor'll be pleased with that?" pa asked triumphantly, as he opened the velvet-covered, satin-lined case in which it had come.

"Oh, yes!" cried Polly. "How nice of you, pa, dear! I'm sure he'll like it awfully."

"And this is for Rosalind," said pa, handing her a small case as he spoke.

"It's a sweet ring," said Polly, taking it out and trying it on her own finger.

The diamonds flashed and glittered in the light from the electric lamp over the dinner-table, and

Polly held her hand so as to catch all the rays as they sparkled out. Inside the band was written:

"I. M. Polly, July 15, 18—."

"What are you going to give me, pa, dear, for getting better?" said Polly, as she put the ring back in its case.

"I'm going to give your mother the profits in the new branch," said pa, "to put by to spend on you two girls."

I drew my breath. I knew what the profits in such a business as was already flourishing in the village would mean. Polly sat herself down on the arm of pa's chair, and twined her arm round his neck.

"It's very good of you, pa, dear," she said, "and Anna Maria and me'll always try to be good girls, and pay you back in love, if nothing else, for all you do for us. But I'd like a little present bought special, dear, by yourself, just to

show that you were glad to keep me when I went so near going away from you all."

"Oh, my girl!" cried pa; "oh, my girl!"

Somehow, I think that illness of Polly's set pa against Norwood, for he never seemed to settle there. At Rosedale he was always restless and uneasy, always sniffing about the drains, and worrying round, comparing it unfavorably with the house where we had lived so long in Astley Crescent.

"I'm sure the only way to ensure a perfect 'ouse," he declared one day, when he fancied Polly was looking a bit off color, "is to build."

"They say that fools build houses for wise men to live in," said ma, quietly.

"Yes; I know they do," pa retorted. "All the same, I 'ave it on my mind to try the experiment for myself."

"Now, we liked Rosedale, even ma. We were somebody in our set. We knew lots of nice peo-

ple, and went to lots of parties, and we gave our share, both summer and winter. Of course, I wasn't actually 'out' as yet; in fact, by Mrs. Leynes's advice, I attended classes in the mornings at a very high-class school, where only the best professors attended. Ma had to pay a pretty penny, I can tell you, and Mrs. Vaughan made quite a favor of what she called "making room for me." But what a lot I did learn there, to be sure.

Not so much out of books, you know, for, of course, ma didn't care so much about that; but we had to talk French all the time, and we had a deportment lesson every day. I was put in the very advanced class for deportment, and we went through a regular course every day from twelve to one o'clock. We had to learn exactly how to shake hands, how to bow in the street, how to enter a room, how to knock at a door; for, as Mrs. Vaughan said, if a lady has no footman, or,

if she has, is out without him, she should be able to knock at a door like a lady, and not like a little dressmaker taking home a frock.

So we all practiced in turns on a large brass knocker fixed outside the large door of the room at the top of the house, where we did calisthenics and dancing. Then Mrs. Vaughan would play the maid-servant, and we would all knock in turn and inquire if Mrs. Vaughan was at home. At first we used all of us to find it an awfully difficult task; but, after awhile, under Mrs. Vaughan's eagle eye, we learned to be able to knock a regular rat-tat-tat with a trill of little tats, and one big one to wind up with, as well as any footman in London.

Then we had to greet the hostess, to receive guests, to give tea, to say good-bye, and to leave the room. That done, we had to learn to enter and get out of a carriage, to bow to Royalty, and to go through all the ceremony of a drawing-

room, each of us with a court train made of calico pinned over her everyday dress.

Polly was so charmed with my description of the deportment lesson that she made ma go and see Mrs. Vaughan and get her to let her join the class. Mrs. Vaughan rather demurred, but eventually, as I was a regular pupil, she gave way, and Polly came every day at twelve o'clock and learned to bow and set down, to knock and shake hands, and all the rest of it.

"And, by the way, my dear girl," said Mrs. Vaughan one morning to me, "*what* did I hear you say you were going to do?"

"To set down, Mrs. Vaughan," I replied.

"To set down *what*?" she asked in an awful voice.

"Myself—on a chair," I said promptly.

"You *set* something down on a table," said she, in cold, clear accents, at which I could see several of the girls sniggering, "but when you wish to

rest yourself you sit down—s-I-T, sit. Now, do you understand?”

“Yes; I said so,” I said very quietly. “I said I was going to set down.”

“*Sit* down—s-I-T!” she exclaimed. “Sit—sit—sit.”

“Set,” I said; and really it was too silly to see that silly old woman working herself up into a regular rage about what I said just as well as she did.

“No; not *set*, but *sit*!” she repeated very distinctly. “Say after me, ‘hit—lit—knit.’”

“‘Hit—lit—knit,’” I said.

“There. Now say ‘pet—wet—bet.’”

“‘Pet—wet—bet,’” I repeated.

“Now say, ‘I am going to sit down.’”

“‘I am going to set down,’” I said.

I really did think she was going to have a fit over it.

“My dear girl, you can have no ear. Say after me again, ‘I will go——’”

“ ‘ I will go——’ ”

“ ‘ And——’ ”

“ ‘ And——’ ”

“ ‘ Sit down.’ ”

“ ‘ Sit down,’ ” I repeated.

“ That’s right. Now, remember, you must watch yourself continually, because you have picked up this little cockneyism probably from your nurse, and you have got to break yourself of it. It is not something that does not matter, my dear girl, but will be a very serious drawback to you if you do not conquer it. It is quite useless, perfectly useless, studying the higher deportment while you allow yourself to say ‘ set ’ down and I ‘ sawr ’ it.”

“ I don’t want to say anything wrong, Mrs. Vaughan,” I said quietly, yet with firmness. “ I am most anxious to do everything just right. My pa——”

She put up her hand to stop me, and waved to the rest of the class.

"Young ladies, the clock has already struck the hour; you may go. Now, my dear girl," she added very kindly, as the girls all trooped out, leaving only me and Polly in the big room, "finish what you were going to say."

"My pa——" I began.

"Your *what?*" she said sharply.

"My pa," I repeated.

"My dear girl," she said, setting down on the throne-like chair wherein she illustrated some of our lessons, "no lady speaks of her pa and ma. You can say 'papa' and 'mamma,' but 'father' and 'mother' is the most correct"—and she said it with such an air, "cor-rect"—"and the most distinguished in every way."

"Well, I never!" Polly flashed out.

Mrs. Vaughan turned a pair of astonished eyes full upon her.

"What did you say, Miss Binks?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Vaughan," said Polly, with a blush. "But the truth was I was so surprised that it slipped out."

"With young ladies things should never *slip out*," said Mrs. Vaughan.

"But we have said 'father' and 'mother' all our lives till quite lately," Polly explained. "It was only after our Ted—my brother, I mean—got married that we took to saying 'pa' and 'ma,' because we admired our sister-in-law so much. Is it really more stylish to say 'father' and 'mother,' Mrs. Vaughan? I noticed that Myra Leynes does."

"It is more *comme il faut*, certainly," said Mrs. Vaughan. "In fact, 'pa' and 'ma' are simply *impossible*—IMPOSSIBLE."

"I'm afraid," said Polly, in rather a crestfallen tone, "that Anna Maria and me have got a great deal to learn."

CHAPTER X.

THE SHADOW OF A CHANGE.

“Better the devil you do know, than the devil you don’t.”

WHEN Polly and me went back home after that lesson in the higher deportment, Polly out with everything to mother.

“Oh, why didn’t you send us to boarding-school in Paris or somewhere so that we could learn all these things?”

“Well, my dear,” said mother, in her everyday, sensible voice, “I never thought of it. You were girls that had always been with your mother, and always hankered after her, and though you were strong and well, you were, every one of you, faddy about your food, and boarding-school food—at least, so I have always heard—is what your

stomachs would have turned against. Besides, your father would have missed you sadly. I had to think of that, especially with such a man for his home and his family as he is."

"Yes, I know," said Polly, rather in a vexed sort of tone; "but father would have let us go for our good, and there's so many things we should have picked up that now we've got older, we find difficult to keep ourselves in mind of."

"Well, my dear," said mother, "it's too late to think of that now. I never liked your calling us pa and ma. To me it sounds fine and horrid. And you both seemed to find it easy enough—easier than you do now to go back to 'father' and 'mother.'"

"Ah, that was only because we were so taken up with Rosalind. She has such a way with her, and it sounded stylish to us."

"I'd rather myself that you'd be good and natural than what you call stylish," said mother.

"It makes me very sad to see you both thinking so much of mere outside things."

"But you like us to improve ourselves," said Polly.

"By all means. But will trying to be fine do it?" asked mother. "No, my dear, never, never. It's the heart that makes the difference. Look at your father—a plain business man, honest and true, with his heart big enough for half a dozen men. Those that know him like him, and respect him, for what he is, not because he lives at Rose-dale or because he is worth so much money. For my part," she went on, shaking her head, "I shall never be anything but what I am, a simple woman, who have honestly tried to do my duty in that sphere of life in which it has pleased God to place me. All these society fid-fads addle me. I get that bothered as to whether I ought to set down or stand up, that half my time I scarce know what I'm doing."

"But you're a lady, mother," cried I.

"Am I?" Well, dear, I hope you'll always think so," she said, smiling sweetly at me. "For myself, I have my doubts about it."

"You're a saint anyway," Polly exclaimed.

Mother smiled again.

"Nay, my love, not yet," she said gently.

I've often thought about it since.

Well, Polly and I—oh, how difficult I did find it not to say "Polly and me," as I'd always done!—Polly and I decided that as Mrs. Vaughan and "Hints" tallied on most points, that we would work hard at the higher department and lay to heart every single thing that she taught us. By her own wish Polly went back to school again, not quite as I did, but for several special subjects in which she felt herself not quite up to the mark. We were very busy then. What with all we had to learn, with managing our dress-allowances, and keeping our various engagements, we

scarcely knew what it was to have a minute to spare. We started a day of our own for our girlfriends in our own sitting-room, which we called "the Lounge," and there we used to have half a dozen or a dozen girls on a Monday afternoon, all as gay as a flight of birds. We had everything of our very own that we had either bought for ourselves out of our allowances or that father or mother or the boys had given us. And we used to have the best cream from the branch, and nice cakes and sweets, and, what with the piano and other things, our afternoons were a great success. Once indeed Mrs. Vaughan herself came, and she told us that we made very good hostesses, and that she had never seen two girls so resolutely set themselves to improve as we had done.

About this time Rosalind had a baby, and Polly and I were left alone at Rosedale with father, as mother went off to Astley Crescent, and stayed all the time, that she might see her through it.

Rosalind was rather compunctious about taking mother away from home for so long, but mother was firm.

"No, my dear girl, it's but a small return to make you for that cruel time when you came to me at the risk of your dear life, and me or mine would let our tongues shrivel in our mouths before ever we would utter a word of complaint, no matter how inconvenient it was. But, as a matter of fact, it ain't inconvenient at all, for the girls can do all at home quite well, and father'll see me as often as ever he wants when he's up in town."

"Well, dear ma," said Rosalind, "I won't humbug by pretending I shan't like to have you with me. I've no ma of my own, you know."

"My dear girl," cried mother, "but you're as much to me as if you was twenty times my own born and bred."

All the same, father didn't like having mother

away. He didn't grumble—he never said a word, poor dear—but he did worse, for he moped. And it is perfectly awful to see a man mope, isn't it? It must have been that that made him so restless, for he got fancying things about Rosedale again, sniffing here and there, and fidgeting about all sorts of things in the house.

At last one day he came home to dinner evidently with something on his mind.

"Girls," said pa, as we sat down to the table and Elizabeth was serving the soup, for she had started us on to having everything carried off and having the housemaid in to help wait, "I've done it."

"Not sold Rosedale!" Polly cried.

"No, oh, no; but I've bought a big place in the country"—rubbing his hands.

"Whatever for?" Polly asked blankly.

"To run a model dairy-farm, and to build a real model house to live in," replied pa.

"Oh, how horrid!" cried Polly.

"Well, it'll take over a year to build," said he, "and at least a year to get thoroughly dry, so you won't have to tear yourself away from Rosedale just yet."

"Mother won't like it," Polly said stoutly.

"We shall see," he replied, nodding his head wisely.

I never knew Polly so vexed in all my life.

"I can't think what's come to him," she said, when we had got safely into our own bedroom. "I suppose it's all that wretched illness of mine last year. As if any one could have any doubt but what it was just an accident. Norwood's good enough for me, I'm sure, and I shall be vexed if father goes and routs us out just as we've got settled and happy. Mother's settled to her new life and contented to be out of business.

"We aren't gone yet," I said. "A big house like father is thinking of building will take a long

time to build, and a longer time to get dry and fit to live in. We haven't left Rosedale yet, Polly."

"No; I hope we shan't," she rejoined, quite sharply.

She was so sweet-tempered, was Polly, that I guessed she must have something very particular to make her so anxious to stay at Rosedale and to show so much warmth about it.

"It'll be real jolly living in a big country place," I ventured.

"That's as maybe," said she, quite snappily. "I don't see the force of going to be snubbed in the country by a lot of people we could buy up over and over again. Here we do know where we are; here we have lots of nice friends that are all just the same sort of people as ourselves; here we don't get sniffed at because our mother doesn't give herself ridiculous airs and wears her hair in plain bands, or because our father smokes a churchwarden and isn't ashamed of it. I tell

you, Anna, my dear, if father takes us away from Rosedale, where we're well known and respected for being exactly what we are, he'll make the very biggest social mistake he has ever made in all his life.

"We're not gone yet," I said; for I saw Polly really was vexed, and I didn't want to add to her annoyance. Poor Polly!

It wasn't so very long after that that I found out why she was so keen on staying at Rosedale. You see, Ted and Rosalind had a fine boy born to them when the time came, and nothing would satisfy father but that the christening must be at the church in the Bathurst Road, and that Mr. Wingfield must perform the ceremony. That meant, of course, giving a great christening party after, and Polly very soon persuaded mother to let us have a dance in the evening by way of winding up the day.

Of course, Ted and Rosalind came to stay for

it, and the other two boys both came home—Georgie from Hampstead, where he was in charge of a big branch, and Dicky from Putney, where he had just been put over another. They were both engaged, these boys, Georgie going to be married very soon, though father had laid it down very straight indeed that Dick should wait till he was turned twenty-one before he took the final step.

Georgie was very ambitious, like father; he had looked out for money. He hadn't been lucky, like Ted, but Miss Haman was well off, and she was a lady. Her father had been something in the city, and she, Gertrude, had never been mixed up with trade in any way before, and she took care to let every one know it. She was years older than Georgie, and no beauty at that; but, as mother said, if Georgie was satisfied, it was no good for us to upset ourselves one way or another.

Dicky might have looked higher. His young

woman was a soft-eyed, flower-faced little creature that frankly sat at his feet and worshiped him. It wasn't good for Dicky, and he bullied her shamefully all the time. However, she seemed so completely gone on him that she even liked that, which, of course, encouraged him to keep on at it in a way that made my very blood boil. I dare say when you've never known what it is to have a penny you haven't worked hard for, when you've always lived in a poky little house, and all your wildest dreams of gentility have meant twenty pounds a year got by teaching little brats to read and write, it does seem like heaven when a handsome man comes along and puts a diamond ring on your finger, and gives you flowers and pretty things to wear, and offers you a good, solid, substantial home, where you'll never know the want of a sovereign again as long as you live. All the same, I don't think if I was to marry a royal duke I should ever lie down and beg him to kick

me as Florence Massan did every day of her life to my brother Dicky.

But it wasn't through them that I found out anything about Polly. Oh, no! It was like this. Rosalind, being still rather frail, was forbidden to dance that night, so she sat out, and her bright eyes saw a good deal more than they would have done if she'd been more occupied with partners herself.

"Anna," she said to me—oh, yes, we had long since dropped my second name, and I was always called Anna now—"Anna," she said, "who is Polly dancing with?"

I looked across the room to where Polly, in a pretty pink frock, had just stopped to take breath.

"Oh, that's Mr. Beddingham," I said.

"Who is he?"

"He's on the Stock Exchange—we've known him a long time. His people live here, but he lives in town somewhere."

“You’ll know him better after a time,” said Rosalind, dryly.

“What do you mean, Rosalind?” I asked, a sharp fear knocking at my heart.

“Mean! What, isn’t it plain enough?” she said, smiling.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WEDDING.

“Marriage is very much the same as death, an opening of a door into another world.”

I MUST say at once that the affair between Polly and Mr. Beddingham did not flourish over well. It was so strange that we had all our lives been everything to each other and yet now not one single word concerning Mr. Beddingham did she let drop, and, so far as that went, we might have been utter strangers to one another. I believe, if Rosalind had not put me up to it, that I should never have seen that there was anything between them; for Polly kept so carefully away from his name in her conversation as if he had been the plague. It was only by a few little signs—

blushes, a shyness of manner, an extra carefulness of toilet when we knew he was coming, and such-like things—that I saw that she looked upon him any differently to all the other young men that came and went at Rosedale.

Just about this time Myra Lzynes was married. She made a very good match, marrying a young doctor who had been her father's pupil years before, and who had set up as a specialist in Harley Street, and had made a tremendous start even there. He was young, not more than thirty, tall and very good-looking, and passionately in love with Myra. I didn't wonder that he was, for Myra was very pretty, so tall and slight, and so stylish in every way, with a way of fearing her clothes, and such pretty, pretty manners.

Father and mother gave her a lovely afternoon-tea and coffee service in silver, with a little tray to match, as father told her that she might keep us in mind every day of her life. I shall

never forget the way she put up her sweet face and kissed him as he wound up :

“ I owe your father such a debt, my dear—not one that can be paid by a few bits of silver.”

“ She’s a fine girl, that,” he said to mother, as we walked home, when the bride had gone away and the wedding was all over. “ No nonsense about her.”

“ A dear girl,” said mother.

And that was the end of Myra. After that she went out of our life as completely as if she had married a Chinaman. When we did meet she was always the same, and when we went to see her in Harley Street she showed us all over her house, and was just the same sweet and pleasant girl that she had always been. But somehow our way never was her way after her marriage.

We had then been over two years at Rosedale, and father was up to his eyes in plans about the new house he was building after his own idea

down on the estate he had bought, and which had now been converted into a gigantic milk-farm, arranged and conducted on the very newest and most scientific system. The new house was not, however, very forward, and had got but a little way beyond the foundations; but, as mother said, it was good for him to have some other occupation than building up fresh businesses, and it would be several years, at the present rate of progress, before it would be ready for us to go into. So we had all quite got to look upon Rose-dale as our permanent home, and upon Dove Hall as something as far off as the kingdom of heaven—a place to which we might go some day, a some day very desirable in itself, but not to be hastened by any conscious act of our own.

When I was turned eighteen, we gave a ball for my coming out. It was a smart affair, I can tell you, with gold cords and tassels to the programmes, menus for the sit-down supper, a band,

and a great marquee with a spring floor erected over the lawn, and leading out of the long French doors between the drawing-room and the conservatory. Then, you see, you passed through the conservatory straight into the ball-room, and so had plenty of space, and no rush of cold air anywhere. The ball was a great success, because we had more men than girls, so that all the girls had partners, and to spare. I never felt more glad to have known Mrs. Vaughan that I was that night, for all the higher department that I had studied with her did come in so useful, and I scarcely forgot anything that she had told me.

And that evening Mr. Beddingham proposed to our Polly. I never suspected it; in fact, the affair had been so long about that I had begun to think of it very much as I thought of Dove Hall. So when Polly came shyly up to me and said: "Anna, darling, I know you'll be more glad than any one that I've been made happy at your birth-

day-ball," I was so taken aback that I almost fainted as I stood.

"You'll wish me joy, Miss Anna?" said he, with his grand air.

"Oh, yes, both of you, of course," I said at once. Then I caught hold of Polly and kissed her. "But your happiness, Mr. Beddingham, will be a dreadful loss to me, to all of us."

"No loss at all, but a gain—one brother the more," he said promptly; and really he was such a grand young man, and said "broth-aw" in such a tone that I almost wondered how Polly had had the cheek to fall in love with him.

The next day Mr. Beddingham came quite early to see father, and between them they settled all the money side of the question. Father was delighted with the engagement.

"What more could any girl want?" he remarked. "A fine, up-standing feller like Beddingham, six feet two in his stocking-feet, and

able to make a good settlement, that, with what I shall give her, will put her above poverty for all the rest of her life."

But to me all the rejoicings were sad enough. I was going to lose my sister, my other half. I should have to sleep in a room to myself, me that had shared a room with Polly, and often enough a bed, for sheer love of company, ever since I could remember anything. I should have the lounge to myself, too. Oh, the very idea made me fairly shiver, and so did the thought of the first and third Monday afternoons, when all our girl friends, and some of their brothers, too, came to see us! Of course, I knew they would never come the same when Polly was gone.

But she was so happy! I don't think I had even seen a girl so utterly happy as she was. One couldn't grudge her to her young man, however much of a loss it might be to us. And everything was rushed on at such a rate that we hadn't much

time for thinking about things. You see, they had been a long time bringing it off, and now that they had made up their minds, they didn't seem as if they were scarce able to wait until Polly had got a few clothes put together. However, on that point both father and mother were firm, and they insisted that they should wait at least three months, so that Polly might have everything got that was necessary, and would be suitable to her new position.

"Such a pity Ted and Rosalind live over that horrid old shop," said Polly to me about a week before the wedding-day, "because it quite prevents any of Oliver's people calling on her or asking her to go and see them. I wonder, when you go to Dove Hall, whether father'll give this place to Ted and Rosalind?"

"I dare say he will if they want it," I said.

"I shall suggest it to him," said Polly. "It would be rather nice to have Rosalind here. She's

a nice girl, and I'm really fond of her; but—well, of course, she is a bit loud; there's no denying that.”

“Oh, Polly!” I burst out.

“Yes; I know you are thinking about my illness,” she said, in that curious new voice of hers. “She was awfully good and kind to me, and I shall never forget it as long as I live, and Oliver won't either. But she *is* a bit loud, Anna, and she does lead one a bit wrong in little things. You know that as well as I do.”

I thought of “pa” and “ma” and half a dozen other little ways in which we had thought Rosalind so stylish, and had afterward found that she hadn't been stylish at all, only different to ourselves.

“Polly,” I burst out, “has it ever struck you that—that we don't know the difference, that we don't seem able to tell when it's stylish and when it's only what Mrs. Vaughan calls ‘quite impos-

sible?' Didn't Mrs. Vaughan tell us the other day that 'don't it' and 'ain't it' are just enough to wreck anybody anywhere? And yet last week, when we were up at Astley Crescent, didn't Lady Millicent say: 'Ain't that sweetly pretty, Mrs. Binks?'"

"Yes, she did! But, all the same, Mrs. Vaughan's perfectly right, Anna, and we owe her a lot—far more than we know of. It's like this—it's *not* right to say 'ain't it' and 'don't it,' and all the other things that people say wrong. But a woman like Lady Millicent, well in with royalty, and as swagger as ever she can stick, can afford to say all sorts of things that we daren't even think of. If we'd been born Lady Mary and Lady Anna, it wouldn't matter a bit whether we talked good grammar or bad; but we are only Polly and Anna Binks of Binks and Sons, and we've got to mind every word we let drop. Lady Millicent's *there*; you and me—I mean, you and I

—aren't there yet. It's a shame, it's unjust, but so it is. And it's just like this with me. I'm young, I'm pretty, I'm going to marry the smartest man I've ever known in my life, and for his sake and my own, to say nothing of the children, if we have any, I mean to get there too before I've done."

"And me too," I rejoined.

We had such a wedding! All the Beddingham family turned up in great force, wearing such clothes and giving such presents. And on our side we had Ted and Rosalind, and Georgie and Gertrude, who had now been engaged quite a long time, and were to be married in about a month's time. I think Gertrude Haman, who was an aut-and-out lady, impressed the Beddingham's as Rosalind, with her bright, winsome bright eyes, her wide mouth, and her impulsive manners, could never have done. But of all the friends on our side who came none created such a

sensation as Lady Millicent. I don't know that even Polly would have thought of asking her, but she asked herself, and did it, too, in such a pleasant way that we couldn't have got out of it if we'd wanted to, which it stood to reason we didn't.

And how she showed up among all the others! She was so pretty, and so friendly, and made herself so agreeable all round, and talked about "my hats and tea-gowns," until scarcely a woman but was wild to go up and give her an order for something or other.

"Yes; come up to Astley Crescent and have a cup of tea with me," I heard her say to one group of girls. "Come as a friend—I won't stick *you* if you don't want to buy anything."

She wouldn't stick them! Why, she might have charged anything she liked when she put it in that way!

"Good-bye, dear little bride," she said to Polly,

as she, in a gray gown trimmed with velvet and touches of gold and a great black picture-hat, was taking leave. "And mind you don't forget your old friends. It's a way little brides have, you know."

"I shall never forget you, Lady Millicent," said Polly, half shyly. "It's more likely to be the other way."

"Nay; my worst enemies couldn't say that of me," said Lady Millicent, quite solemnly. "And I owe your dear, kind, good mother too much ever to forget her. Come and see me when you get home again."

As soon as the bride had gone she left too.

"Dear, kind friend," she said to mother, "I must go. My dummies at Astley Crescent may have lost half a dozen customers for me. Business is business, and must be attended to. By the way, what a wonderful effect of color that is. Did you ever see anything like it?"

In truth, I was quite startled by the tones of color that she pointed out. For I, as chief bridesmaid, had carried a loose posy of yellow roses, and, finding them a nuisance to carry about, had put them safely by on a side-table, where I had laid them down without noticing that I had put them against a scarf of faded rose-colored *crêpe-de-chine*, which mother had worn over shoulders at the wedding.

“Yellow roses half-blown and old rose with a touch of gold,” said Lady Millicent. “I shall go home and immortalize the scheme at once.”

CHAPTER XII.

DOVE HALL.

"It is astonishing how, when people get up in the world, the ties of family affection begin to weaken."

WITHIN a year of Polly's wedding we left Rosedale for ever and took up our abode at Dove Hall. I was glad in one way and sorry in another. For one thing, I was glad to start fresh in a new neighborhood and on a new scale. We were much, much richer than when we had gone to Rosedale, and father was one of those people who never grudge spending money because he happened to have made it himself.

"What money fetches is what money's worth," he used to say. "I 'ate people to spend what they 'aven't got, nipping and screwing and pinching to keep up appearances; it's little if anything

short of dishonest. But if you 'ave money, and will be happier by spending it, why, you're a fool to hoard it for others to spend later on."

So he spent freely and ungrudgingly, and we started life at Dove Hall with a carriage and pair, in addition to the brougham and victoria that we had driven at Rosedale. Father still had his cart, and I had a trap of my own, and a riding-horse too. And mother had her own maid, though not without protest all the same.

"My dear," she said, when it was first talked about, "it makes me miserable to let a soul lay so much as a finger on my head. She would have to do my hair for me——"

"Not if you didn't choose her to, mother," said Polly.

Mother looked doubtful.

"Oh, well, as to that," she said, "I never did see the force of keeping a dog and barking myself. I don't want a maid, and I shan't be com-

fortable with a maid; but if I've got to have one for show, I'll not keep her to look at. I didn't like Elizabeth waiting at table when we first went to Rosedale, but I got used to it after a bit, and I dare say I should miss it now."

So we persuaded her to start a maid, and we also set up a butler and a footman when we took possession of Dove Hall; and I'm sure any one to see my father sitting down every night in his evening clothes, and mother in her good velvet gown with its trimming of rich white lace, would never have believed that he had once gone round with the milk-cans, or that she had ever served in the shop.

"I do feel, mother, darling," said Polly, when she came down to Dove Hall for the first time after we had settled in, "that you have got a really comfortable house at last."

"It will be when we've got used to it," said mother.

"At present I feel it's too large. I like a modest house best."

"You must have a home that you can ask us all to, if you want to," said Polly. "I suppose you've had heaps of callers?"

"A good number," said mother.

"Good people?" asked Polly.

"Well, that's hard to say until we've returned the calls," mother replied.

"We weren't in when they all came, Polly," said I. "But I fancy it's rather a good neighborhood. The vicar called yesterday. He's not married."

"Of course, you'll go to church."

"I did think of that," said poor mother. "But, you know, Polly, I have always attended the Congregational. I—I couldn't find my places."

I really couldn't help laughing at her woe-begone expression of face.

Polly, however, took it quite seriously.

"There's nothing to laugh at, Anna," she said, solemnly. "Of course, it's quite true that mother never has attended church, and nobody knows the service by instinct, or any service, for the matter of that. As to finding her places, that's a simple matter. Anna, you go up to Norwood next week and see Mrs. Vaughan. She's the one woman you can go to and ask about such a thing.

"But, Polly, you go to church yourself now," I cried. "Why can't you show us?"

Polly looked rather confused.

"Well, to tell you the truth," she said, with a blush, "I've only been to church about three times since I was married. Oliver always wants to go somewhere on Sunday, and if not, he likes to laze about. When I do go——"

"Well?"

"Oh, well, I look over his book, and make a shot at finding the right place."

"But why don't you ask him? He knows you

always went to the Congregational church. You were married there!" I cried.

"Yes; I know he does," she admitted. "But I never give myself away to Oliver; I don't think it pays with most husbands."

Now, wasn't that cute of Polly? I looked at her in profoundest admiration. I don't think any of us had altered and improved as much as she had done since we had launched out from Astley Crescent.

"I don't think that there's much now you don't know, Polly," I burst out.

"Oh, yes, there is," said Polly, promptly. "And I can tell you a husband like mine is a liberal education. Only—only—— Oh, well, I'd better not say that," she broke off confusedly.

"Yes, do say, Polly," I cried; "you're at home. I'm not like any one else. Do tell me."

"Well, it's—it's best to know everything before you get married, because when you make a good

marriage in a social sense, it's rather like going in for an examination, with one's heart in one's mouth."

She gathered her laces together and went off to her room, leaving mother and me looking at one another in rather a nonplussed kind of way.

"She seems very happy and very much wrapped up in him," she said. "But, for my part, I could never have contented myself with a husband that wasn't just on my own level. I know so well what she means about having her heart in her mouth. Poor child! It makes me think of that story in the poem about the poor girl that was wedded to a lord, and when she found it out she pined away and died. Dear, dear, it's bad enough to have to pick and choose one's words before company, but to have a company husband would be like always setting on the edge of a knife."

She was so sensible, was mother, she always

seemed to hit the nail on the head so well. And she always took her own stand too, did mother, so that even in things that she didn't know she came out right, and carried her position with dignity. There was a great difference between her and Polly. It went against mother's conscience to seem to be anything that she wasn't.

"I am what I am," she used to say, "and those who want to know me must take me as I am."

Now, Polly was different to this. She was always playing a part, always kind of playing at being a grand lady, as being a woman of position, and she never seemed to want to sit down for a rest. Now, I did. I was quite as ambitious as Polly was, but I didn't keep it up as well. I used to get tired or flurried, and then I couldn't help forgetting. I used to get mad with myself, because one forget did such a lot of harm, and slips do seem to stick so in people's minds.

However, I must get on with my story and not

talk so much about myself. As I said, we were settled at Dove Hall, and though we entertained lavishly enough, supported all the local charities, subscribed to the hunt, and started a soup-kitchen for the winter, and undertook to supply all the sick in the parish with invalid food, we couldn't get any further socially.

True, we had lots of people on our visiting-list, over thirty, and mother and I used to drive round with a card-case making solemn calls and talking about the weather, but though we went to a dinner now and again, or to a big garden-party where nobody was introduced to anybody, we never seemed to settle down as we had done at Rosedale. Personally, I don't believe it pays living down in the country. The game certainly is *not* worth the candle. Of course, our estate was nothing of an estate judging by the two or three great land-owners round about. Not that they were the very smallest good to anybody in a social

sense excepting for opening bazaars or laying foundation-stones of new schoolrooms or other buildings not sufficiently important to attract royalty.

Still, we had just over a hundred acres, and though our house was new, we had everything in the way of pleasure grounds that could well be laid out in six acres of land. On one side of the house the rooms opened onto a broad terrace with a walk overlooking the park and with a broad flight of steps at either end. We had a great conservatory running all along another side of the house, a marble fountain, a bowling-alley, an Italian garden, a rosary, and the very best tennis-court and croquet-ground that ever I played on. As father said, it might be new, but it was wholesome, and would bear looking into. The expert gardener who laid out the grounds had so arranged them as to take advantage of every tree that happened to be growing, and for the rest, it

was no use people looking round and sneering about its newness, for there weren't such roses or such flowers in all the countryside.

Still, as I say, a life in the country isn't worth it. Everybody came down on us like a swarm of locusts.

"Now, Mrs. Binks, you must help me out with my old women, or my young women, or my orphans, or my ill-used children."

We were expected to give, give, give, to buy up whole stalls at bazaars, to strip our gardens and conservatories for all sorts of decorations, to give prizes for all sorts of shows, to provide for all the needy, to be soft to the widow and the fatherless.

"You're so rich and generous, Mr. Binks," the ladies used to say, when they got hold of father. "You'll never miss it."

Then there were the tips of all sorts that seemed absolutely necessary if we meant to be anybody in country life. I'm sure at Christmas we spent

enough to have kept a family. In fact, it took mother and the cook the best part of a week to arrange all the hampers, for nobody must be forgotten. There was an extra large one for the station-master, others for all the railway officials, and we had to put on the list the post-mistress, the huntsman, every one of our own laborers, all the old women at the almshouses, the matron of the orphanage, the parish clerk—until, as father said at last, it seemed as if we had left out nobody excepting the minister, or, I should say, the vicar of the parish.

“I’ve literally not had time to get a thing for my relations,” said mother to Polly the day before Christmas Eve. “There’s Ted and Rosalind, and the other boys and their wives. And there’s your father’s sisters; I’ve always sent each of them something at Christmas-time. I must go up to London first thing in the morning, and when I’ve got what I want, I must go to Astley Crescent,

and pack them there so as to get them sent off in time."

"I shouldn't, mother, darling," said Polly; "you'll be utterly fagged out."

"Oh, I must," said mother; and she looked quite shocked at Polly, for she had always kept a tight hold on the old customs and festivals.

"Well, I suppose you will have to buy something for the boys and their wives, unless you like to give them a check each, to spend as they like. But for Aunt Emily and Aunt Sarah, and Cousin Gilbert and her children, and Marion Selford and all her swarm, I certainly should never dream of putting myself out to buy special things for them."

"My own sisters-in-law!" said mother, aghast.

"Oh, well, if they are your sisters-in-law, they're very little good to you," Polly said, icily. "What did you do with all those things Mrs. Winton made you buy at the bazaar the last time

I was down here? Turn them all over and see if you can't find things that will do very well. You bought them ever so many toilet-tidies, pin-cushions and pillow-shams, and some quite nice pinafores, too. Surely, they're good enough to send any one."

Mother rather unwillingly went to the room where she kept all her stores of linen and such-like, and turned out all the purchases that had been forced on her at the various sales of work to which we had gone. Polly made a selection quickly enough.

"That for Aunt Sarah," holding up a large blue-silk pin-cushion; "that for her eldest girl; this pinafore for little Lotty. I'm sure, if Aunt Sarah doesn't like that she ought to be ashamed of herself."

"But, Polly," put in mother, "there isn't the value of the hampers we sent to the laborers."

"Oh, well, as to that," said Polly, "the laborers

expect it of you. Relations are different. You've *got* to keep in with the station-master and all those people. A little remembrance is all relations look for."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TOWERS.

“Prosperity does not suit everybody.”

WHAT I had more than anything against the neighborhood of Dove Hall was the fact—a sad and melancholy fact—that there were no young men. It is true that the Ormondes had a brother and two cousins, who used to come down very often on Saturday afternoons to Miles Court and stay till Monday morning. But they were no good to me, or, indeed, to anybody but the Ormonde girls, who took good care that no one else had a look in where their “boys,” as they called them, were concerned. They said that Greville Ormonde, who was eating his dinners for the bar, and who looked one up and down as if one

was a filly for sale, and he didn't feel like being a buyer, didn't care for dancing or for girls.

"When our brother Greville comes down, and sometimes one or both of our cousins with him," said Katharine Ormonde to me one day, "we never can get him to show. He says he can't stand the local young women anyhow after London girls."

"I can quite understand that," I rejoined very tartly. "I think they're so wise, because, being local young men themselves, they should mix as much with London people as they possibly can. Of course, I've lived in London all my life, you know, and what strikes me more than anything else now I am down here is the horrid localness of everybody. One would think, to hear some of the people in the neighborhood talk, that this was a foretaste of heaven, and Lord and Lady Dovedale the angels with flaming swords that stand at the gates."

She never gave me any of her impudence after that, but was quite civil and friendly. But I didn't forget. I don't believe in forgetting either good or bad, for neither way pays. Polly isn't like that. Look how she forgot about Rosalind. But there; I mustn't start on that story to-day, or else I shall never finish about Katharine Ormonde and her boys. As I say, I didn't forget, and the next time the Ormondes had a garden-party on, with a dancing-marquee and a band, and unlimited strawberries and cream, and cup of all sorts, I just didn't go. And I didn't pretend I had an engagement either; I just didn't go. That rather brought my young ladies to their bearings, for they had a sale of work on at the time, and if I had gone they'd have been at least ten pounds in pocket, for father is so generous he always forks out well when there's any sort of charity on foot.

Scarcely any of the other families had sons besides the Ormondes. The Dwyers had two boys

at Harrow, and the Mackenzies had a boy at Eton, but they didn't exactly count, you see. Then there were the Combes at Combe Stratton with several sons, but all away and out in the world—one in Western Australia, one in Japan, and the third on a tea-plantation in Ceylon. Then the only son of the Mordaunts was learning to be a doctor in London, and both the boys at the doctor's were away from home altogether. Now, in all these houses there were girls, and so you can imagine what an Adamless Eden Dovedale was!

Then, of course, our three boys were married, and all three of them so wrapped up in their wives and babies that they were no good to me at all, not even to bring home other young fellows to help make things hum a little. Oh, dear, take it all round, my life was very grand, but it was horribly dull!

It was, therefore, natural enough that I should spend a good deal of my time with Rosalind at

dear Rosedale. I might have been expected to go more to Polly's, but, somehow, the atmosphere of Polly's house didn't suit me like my brother's did. For Polly had never been the same since her marriage; she seemed so taken up with society, and such a lift above all her own people, that I felt kind of frozen in her company.

Now, with Rosalind I always felt gay and happy. Rosalind might be a bit loud, as Polly was so fond of reminding one, but she was so bright and full of fun, always ready to take a bit of pleasure when occasion offered, and she was always the same. I don't wonder our Ted was as wrapped up in her as he was, for she was a splendid wife to him, and never turned up her nose at the business that had made us all rich and well up in the world, as Polly was so fond of doing.

"Really, Rosalind," Polly said one day, when she had driven over to see me at Rosedale, "I do wonder you should take up with the Tompkin-

sons. They're no use to any one, tradespeople like them."

"Tradespeople, indeed!" Rosalind flashed out. "And why shouldn't I know tradespeople? We're tradespeople ourselves."

"A colossal concern like Binks and Sons——" began Polly, turning absolutely scarlet.

"Pooh!" Rosalind interrupted. "It's trade all the same—retail trade! Not that I mind. I married my dear old Ted because I fell in love with him, though my people did think I might have looked higher. I don't know that I'm any better or worse for it in a social sense, but I'm happy and Ted's happy, and that's the main thing."

"Oh, of course, just as you like," said Polly, loftily. "It's nothing to me what sort of a swim you're in. If the Tompkinsons make you happy, you're quite right to stick to them. What I came for to-day was to ask you and Anna to come to

my drawing-room tea on the 26th. I'm going to be presented."

"Oh, yes, we'll come with pleasure," said Rosalind—"with pleasure. Who's going to present you?"

"Lady Bunderby," said Polly, languidly. "Well, I must be going. I'm so fearfully busy just now. Good-bye, Rosalind, my dear. Good-bye, Anna, darling."

Rosalind stood at the window watching my sister get into her carriage.

"There goes a good woman gone wrong," she said, with a quick sigh. "Do you know, Anna, I never like to think of Polly as she was and Polly as she is now."

"She has altered," I admitted.

"She doesn't seem to see the right end up of things," said Rosalind. "Can't she see that getting presented by Lady Bunderby is social damnation and nothing else. I can't get present-

ed just yet—I may later on when Ted's a big enough tradesman; but when I do it won't be by a City woman, I can tell you. I shall get a duchess to stand social godmother for me."

"A duchess!" I stood and stared at her.

"Lor', yes, my dear; they've all got their price, every one of them," said Rosalind, with a laugh. "Of course, at present, as Binks and Sons stands, I couldn't go to Court, but after it's turned into a company it will be another matter altogether."

We went to Polly's drawing-room tea on the 26th. What a show it was, and what a crowd! Polly looked charming in white satin embroidered with seed pearls, with a lot of new diamonds about her, and a bouquet that was a perfect dream. And Lady Bunderby was there too—a fat, red-faced old lady, with a hoarse voice and thick red arms; and there was a gaunt daughter, whose looks had seen better days. They were both awfully well dressed, with lovely jewels and

exquisite flowers, and nobody seemed to see that Lady Bunderby would have looked more at home in a kitchen. As for Polly, she went up like a rocket after that, and got very exclusive, what she called smart. I admired her for it in some ways, for I was quite as ambitious as she was, and I never could see the good of sitting down satisfied to be at the bottom. But Polly went too far; she made herself uncomfortable, and that seemed to me rather silly.

Of course, Polly had married a society man, and she was quite right to live up to his position, and better it if she could; but when she began to pick her own flesh and blood to pieces, and to perfectly fag herself out in her efforts to be grand, why, that was what I call going too far, and making a sacrifice of herself to no purpose.

“Now we shall be able to breathe again,” said Rosalind, with her gay laugh, as we came down the steps of Polly’s house.

It was such a big, smart house, with balconies full of lovely flowers kept by contract, with a garden that was tended in the same way, and real lace curtains to all the windows. The day of her drawing-room tea there were at least a dozen footmen waiting about, so grand that they made me shiver in spite of myself and of the fact that we had two men-servants waiting at dinner every night of our lives. Those who had been at the drawing-room had great posies pinned to their breasts, and looked proud enough to have been royalties themselves, instead of only serving-men who had waited outside.

The next day Polly drove over to see us again.

"I want you to come and stay a few days with me, Anna," she said, when she had languidly touched each of us on both cheeks.

"Oh, Anna can't possibly go away yet!" cried Rosalind.

Polly lifted her eyebrows.

“And why?”

“Because she has made several most particular engagements,” said Rosalind, stoutly.

“How very tiresome!” said Polly. “I especially wished to have her after Thursday. I have several things on that she would have liked. However, since you’ve fixed yourself up, I must do without you. But what day will you come?”

We fixed the day, and she went away, having an engagement for lunch not very far away. It was extraordinary how busy Polly always was. She never had more than a few minutes to spare when she came to Rosedale, and always had something or other on to which she had “positively to fly.”

“I’m so glad to have got you away from Rosalind, Anna, darling,” she said, when I arrived at the Towers. “Of course, I know she’s very dear and sweet and all that, and that she makes Ted a perfectly splendid wife. But seriously, she

is—you know. 'And I've been so nervous lest you should take up with some young man in her set. You know, Anna, with your looks and your money, you can look higher than that."

"I don't seem to be in the way of taking up with a young man in any one's set," I rejoined, with a laugh. "I was twenty-one last month. I'm getting on, Polly."

"Time enough," said she, nodding her head.

I am bound to say she trotted out all sorts and conditions of young men for my inspection, but somehow they never seemed good enough to think of as being worth tying one's self to for life. I liked them to dance with and to flirt with, and that was all.

I had been at the Towers three days, when one day, just at lunch time, Polly got a telegram from Oliver. She opened it in her usual languid way, but gave a great start as she grasped its

contents. Then she passed it to me, and I read:

"Bringing Lord Robert Blount down to dinner to-night."

And she made such a fuss over it. A dozen questions seemed to rise to her lips at once. Should she get a few friends to meet him? Should she wear her best white satin gown, the one she had had new the week before for Lady Bunderby's ball, or should she wear the new pink one that hadn't yet seen the light? Should she put the champagne in ice at once, and must she order fresh table flowers?

"My dear Polly," I said, "the flowers were fresh this morning. Wear your plainest black evening gown. Just think over the dinner, for you may be able to make one or two little improvements in the menu. Tell Walters that 'your master is bringing a gentleman down,' but don't say who. You can tell him what wine to have, but leave the icing to him."

She drew a long breath as if she were relieved.

"You evidently don't know the importance of Lord Robert Blount," she said. "He can make or mar any woman. In society he is all powerful. Oh, if only Oliver had known him before I got presented!"

"It's no use getting into a flurry," I said, quietly. "He wants something of us, or he wouldn't be coming to-night."

"You have got so detestably commercial lately, Anna," Polly cried.

"All the better if I have. I'm sure if this Lord Blount sees that his coming has put you in flurry, he won't think half as much of you as if you take him as a matter of course. And, after all, who is Lord Blount when he's at home? I dare say father could buy him up, and have enough to spare for all of us."

"Oh, be quiet!" cried Polly, pettishly.

“What’s the good of pretending that such a man isn’t somebody important? By the by, I wonder if Oliver remembered that we had asked young Knipp for to-night?”

CHAPTER XIV.

REMEMBER !

“Many excellent persons, who are quite capable of comporting themselves with ease and dignity on ordinary occasions, go completely astray when brought face to face with unusual circumstances.”

I NEVER saw Polly show to so little advantage as she did that evening Oliver brought Lord Blount down to the Towers. In the first place, she hadn't taken my advice about her frock, but was wearing the new pink gown, which was much too dressy for a quiet dinner of five people. I saw Lord Blount kind of run his eye over her with a look of surprise and admiration mixed.

“So kind of you to let Beddingham bring me down in this unceremonious fashion,” he said, as he took her hand.

He was a tall, light man, very fair and stylish-

looking. It would be hard to say his age, for he looked very young in some lights and rather old in others—at least, I mean past his youth. His voice was very soft and sweet, and he had a curious accent, something of a drawl and something of a clipping of his words. Now, he was a man—But then, as the thought came into my head, I labeled it impossible, for what Lord Blount or Lord Anybody else would ever look at me in that way?

“I’m delighted to see you, Lord Blount,” said Polly. “Let me introduce my sister to you.”

He turned from her to me and took my hand, holding it fast—no, not fast, but with a gentle, protective kind of friendliness, just as he had done hers.

“I am charmed to meet you, Miss—er—Miss——”

“Binks,” I said.

“Ah, yes; now I think of it, Beddingham did

tell me your name when he said I should meet you this evening." Then he turned back to Polly. "What a perfectly charming place you have here, Mrs. Beddingham! Who would think we were within driving distance of London. I suppose you do drive? How long does it take you to the Criterion, for instance?"

"About half an hour—sometimes less if the road is clear and the horses are fresh," Polly replied.

Then the door opened, and Walters announced "Mr. Knipp."

I had never seen Mr. Knipp before. He came in and straight up to Polly.

"I'm afraid I'm rather late, Mrs. Beddingham," he said.

"If you are it doesn't matter," said Polly; "for Oliver brought Lord Blount down with him, and he is gone up to dress. We are always bound to give him a few minutes' grace, you know. By

the way, do you know Lord Blount? Let me introduce you—Mr. Knipp,” she added to Lord Blount.

“I am afraid I am only Lord Robert Blount,” said the guest of the evening, in a very modest kind of way. “Lord Blount is my elder brother, unfortunately for me—in a money sense, I mean,” he added, all in a hurry, as a queer expression came upon Polly’s face, “for as a brother I am devoted to him.” Then he just touched Mr. Knipp’s hand, and turned back to me again.

A minute or two later Oliver Beddingham came in, and we all stood chatting while waiting for dinner to be served. Oliver Beddingham wasn’t in the least flurried by his grand guest. He called him Blount as if he’d been a city man like himself, and treated him in the most ordinary manner possible. I saw that Polly was bothered as to how she must address him. He had told her himself that he wasn’t Lord Blount, and yet

Oliver called him plain Blount without any title at all. I did wish I could have had a dip into "Hints" at that moment. I should have found out all about it there, I know.

It did seem a thousand pities, but in her flurry Polly made such a slip—a real forget. For when we went in to dinner, Oliver leading the way by himself, turning half round as he went, and talking ever so easily to Mr. Knipp and me, and Polly and Lord Robert Blount bringing up the rear, she went to the head of the table, and, pointing to the chair between Lord Robert Blount and Oliver, said:

"You set there, Anna."

And in her flurry she never seemed to realize what she had said. I caught a flicker go across Lord Robert Blount's face, but if Oliver heard he kept himself well under control.

"I think, darling, if you'll excuse me, that it would be the best way, as we are such an awk-

ward number as five, if Lord Robert sat on your right hand instead of your left. We can't part Mr. Knipp from the lady he brought in, can we?"

"I'll alter the cover, sir," put in Walters, anxiously. "I thought you would bring in Miss Binks."

"As in strict politeness I ought to have done," said Oliver, good-humoredly. "But when the lady is a sister-in-law, it makes a very nice distinction whichever way one takes it, eh, Blount?"

"I think it is all right as it is," said Lord Robert, smiling.

Polly was right enough when she declared that it was a liberal education to be married to a husband like hers. You see, he knew right enough how to address the lord—Lord Robert! Simple enough when you knew. All the same, I took an opportunity of making sure when Polly and I left the table and the three men to enjoy their cigarettes.

"Polly, where do you keep 'Hints?'" I asked.

"Oh, I threw that away ages since!" said Polly.

"Did you? Oh, well, you were pretty fogged to-night about how to call him," I said, a little sharply. "And you made an awful slip——"

"Hush—sh!" cried she, with her finger to her lips and looking apprehensively round. "Here's Walters with the coffee. Hush—sh!"

I shut up at once, and sat idly back in my chair, as Walters, followed by a footman, served us with coffee and *liqueurs*. Then, when the door closed, my sister turned eagerly to me and said:

"What did I do?"

"You said to me: 'You set there, Anna.'"

"Did I really? Are you sure?"

"Yes; I'm quite sure that you really did," I replied; "and what was more, Lord Robert noticed it."

"Did Oliver?"

"I fancy not. He hid it wonderfully well if he did."

"Oh, then he didn't! That's all right," she said, in a relieved tone. "As to Lord Robert—Oh, well, it's fearfully annoying, for it's only when I'm upset and flurried that little things slip out."

"You ought to be sure on that point by this time, Polly," I said, rather severely; for really Polly did pick holes so in every one else.

"Yes, I ought. It only shows how careful one ought to be in bringing children up. If we had been sent to first-class French or German schools, or both, we should never make slips of that kind. But, of course, neither father nor mother, poor darlings, had any ambition beyond making money, or any ideas that we should want to begin where they leave off."

"They gave us a much better education than either of them had, but I don't know that any of us are as much of a credit to it," I remarked.

“It’s not a question of education; it’s—— Oh, well, don’t let us go into that subject, Anna, unless you want me to be as cross as two sticks when the men come in. Because father says he ‘ates ‘oarding money,’ and mother says, ‘Fetch me them things,’ we don’t love them or admire and respect them any less. But it would be absurd of us, who know better, to go on saying the same when we know that it’s correct to say ‘hate hoarding’ and ‘those things.’ If ever I have a child,” Polly went on, “I shall be most particular about her surroundings. I shall have a lady-nurse—French, if I can find one. And I shall cultivate her speech and manners as the first and foremost consideration.” And then we heard the men coming, and Polly smoothed herself down into her usual society trim.

Lord Robert and Oliver both made for Polly and Mr. Knipp made for me. He was big and rather slow-speaking, good-looking enough, for

I was never one to care much about pretty men; I'd as soon sit and admire a wax dummy in a hairdresser's window. He must have been getting on for forty, a fine-made, well-covered figure, neither too fat nor too thin. I always did hate a man with a waistcoat; but then, on the other hand, I do detest a hollow under the chest like some men have. Now, Mr. Knipp had neither one nor the other.

He was a brownish man with a heavy mustache, and very quiet ways with him. He wasn't grand like Oliver Beddingham, who somehow always reminded me of that new-fashioned mahogany one sees in the West-End furniture shops. You know the kind I mean—so red and smooth and shining, and yet not a patch on the older kind that's been rubbed and rubbed with generations of oil and turpentine and elbow-grease.

"Do you sing, Mrs. Beddingham? Are you musical?" Lord Robert asked presently.

"I am passionately fond of music," said Polly, "but my talent lies in listening."

"And a very good talent, too," said he. "And you, Miss Binks, are you a listener or not?"

"Yes; when I get it good enough to listen to," I replied. "But I've no ambition to be a young lady with a mandolin, or to sing nigger-songs to a banjo."

He laughed as if I had said something out of the common clever; and then Oliver said:

"But you sing, Blount. I heard you the other night. It will be a perfect treat to my wife. She really and genuinely loves music."

I must say it was news to me. However, of course, Oliver knew Polly much better than I did, so I couldn't or rather wouldn't, even look my surprise. And then Lord Robert went over to the piano, which was a grand, covered with a lovely embroidered silk fitting cover, and loaded with all sorts of knick-knacks.

"Let me see," he said. "I wrote a little song for Lady Swansdown the other day. She's so artistic—a born painter, ruined by having been fated to marry a marquis, and become a duchess in the natural order of things. I think you would like it, Mrs. Beddingham. Lady Swansdown said it haunted her."

"I know I shall," said Polly, setting herself deep down in her chair.

And so he began to play a sort of dreamy up-and-down kind of thing, like arpeggio scales with a tune running through them; and this was the song. I know the words, because he sent Polly a copy, and I took them from that.

"REMEMBER!"

"Under the warm southern sky,
We wandered alone, you and I;
Hand clasped in hand as we stood
On the threshold of love, in the wood.
Oh—love, will you ever forget
The dear days we our happiness set?
Remember! Remember!"

“ Under the blue sky one night,
When the stars shone out golden and bright,
We sat, you and I, while our aching hearts knew
That for us the old love must be lost in the new.

Oh—love, will you ever forget
The old days ere we parted? And yet—
Remember! Remember!

“ Sometimes in the lamp-light we meet,
And I see all the world at your feet;
Dear heart, do you ever remember
The rapture of one brief September?
Oh—love, can you ever forget
The night that we passed in regret?
Remember! Remember!”

He sang it well, with a soft, harsh voice—I don't know if I make myself clear in saying that his voice was both soft and harsh—with hands that seemed to drag the music out of the keys, with eyes half closed, that seemed to be looking back into the dim years of the past, at the other end of which we could see the girl stand who had to choke her love down that she might marry a marquis, and one day become a duchess.

“ It is too utterly sad for words,” said Polly,



"WHAT ARE YOU THINKING OF? I'D GIVE ANYTHING TO KNOW."

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in a very soft voice. "Does it tire you to sing, Lord Robert? Can you go on? I could listen for ever."

I really don't know how she could—she, a respectable married woman, with her husband sitting by! And for a song that had been written for another married woman by her old cast-off lover that she hadn't thought good enough for a husband! I looked at Lord Robert, and wondered he hadn't more pride, at least, than to give strangers as we were the clue to his love story.

"Miss Binks," said Mr. Knipp in my ear at that moment, "what *are* you thinking of? I'd give anything to know."

"Perhaps he's proud of having been jilted by a duchess," I rapped out.

He sat up quite straight.

"By jove, you are——" he began, and then suddenly stopped. "I beg your pardon, Miss Binks, I—I—I forget what I was going to say,"

CHAPTER XV.

THE REIGN OF SIMPLICITY.

"A glimpse into another world, though it be only, as it were, through an unconsidered chink, is often enough to effect a revolution in a woman's mind."

AFTER that night we seemed to see Mr. Knipp wherever we went—he was everywhere. Somehow I couldn't get him out of my head. I dreamt about him all that first night, waking twenty times at least, then dropping off to sleep again, and dreaming it all over again, until I could have knocked my stupid head against the bedpost. I felt quite washed out in the morning and rather cross; in fact, much too cross to listen quietly to my sister's vaporings about Lord Robert Blount.

"That lovely song," she said, rapturously.
"He has promised to send me a copy."

"What for?" I asked, unfeelingly. "You can't sing it."

Polly shrugged her shoulders in a fashionable kind of way, as if I was getting as "impossible" as all the rest of my family.

"I don't sing in company," she said, with mild reproach, "because I hate amateurs unless they're very, very good, and, in fact, equal to the best professionals. But I often sing when I'm alone, for my own amusement."

"Oh, do you really?" I returned. "Yes; I heard Oliver say last night how fond you are of music. When did you take up that notion?"

"I've always loved music," said Polly, with dignity. "And I should think even a stone would be moved by such a lovely song as that one Lord Robert sang last night. It has never been out of my head since. 'Remember! Remember!'"

I laughed outright.

"Oh, well, if it pleases you to like a song writ-

ten for another woman, I don't mind. I wonder if Lady Swansdown, who'll be the Duchess of Poultry one day, would be pleased if she knew he gives her away every time he sings the song. I shouldn't think she would."

"A woman of fashion like that minds nothing in the way of publicity," said Polly. "But tell me, you dear, cross old thing, how did you like Mr. Knipp?"

"He seems nice enough," I replied guardedly.

"Oliver thinks an awful lot of him," Polly went on. "He has a tremendous position on 'Change. By the way, I asked him to go to the Lyceum with us to-night. We have a box, you know."

It was very queer, I couldn't make it out at all, but my heart began thumping like a sledge-hammer at the prospect of so soon seeing him again.

"So I asked him to dine here at a quarter to seven, and he is going to take us all to the Golden

Grill to supper afterward. Of course, the Golden Grill is *the* smart place for supper this season."

Mr. Knipp did dine with us, and we drove up to the theater in good time for the performance, and he sat next to me, and talked to me between the acts, and I enjoyed myself thoroughly.

Polly, on the other hand, was too much taken up with the audience to pay much attention to the play.

"Oliver," she said, for about the sixth time, "is there *nobody* you know here?"

"Not a single soul," was his reply.

"So odd," she exclaimed, in quite a vexed tone, "to come to a theater and not see a soul we know."

"But you didn't come to see people, Polly," I put in; "you came to see the play."

"Yes, yes; of course. But it does seem so very strange. So many people as we know, too."

"I see somebody I know by sight, Mrs. Beddingham," said Mr. Knipp at that moment. "The lady Lord Robert was talking about last night—Lady Swansdown."

She was all eagerness in a moment.

"Oh! Where? Where? Do show me!"

"In that box opposite," said he.

Polly turned her opera-glasses straight upon the occupants of the opposite box, in which two ladies were sitting and several men.

"Which is her?" she asked.

"The one in black, with fair hair."

Polly gave a sort of gasp. I confess that I, too, was surprised, for I had pictured Lady Swansdown, the heroine of "Remember!" as a very different kind of person. She was very fair, slightly haggard, but with a stylish, weird kind of beauty, very stylish, if rather unearthly. Her gown was like nothing I had ever seen before, and I flattered myself I had seen a few

gowns in my time; it made me remember my advice the previous day to Polly, to wear her plainest black frock. It was, as far as I could see, nothing but fold upon fold of black *crêpe de chine*, which seemed to melt wherever there were edges into softer frothings of chiffon. These were caught up on one shoulder with a great flaming sun of diamonds, and not another sign of a jewel could I see about her, not even on her hands, for her bare left hand was resting on the edge of the box, and bore nothing but her broad wedding ring.

“Very curious-looking woman, isn’t she?” said Mr. Knipp.

Polly caught her breath.

“She’s a perfect dream of stylishness,” she said, in a tone that was distinctly reproving; “quite fit to be the keynote of such a song as ‘Remember!’”

I had very hard work to keep from laughing

aloud, and Mr. Knipp muttered, "Oh, Lord!" under his breath. Really, Polly could make herself ridiculous, and often did.

Before I went home, which I did at the end of the week, I saw that the reign of severe simplicity had set in. She never put on one of her best frocks, but every evening wore little simple gowns that she might have put on her young daughter of fifteen had she possessed one. And she left off wearing her rings, and wore nothing but a big diamond arrow on one side of her bodice. And all day long she hummed or sang little snatches of Lord Robert's song, so that her conversation got to be something like this—

"Anna, dearest, do you happen to be writing to Mother to-day? Because if you are——

' Sometimes in the lamp-light we meet,
And I see all the world at your feet.'

I didn't get the time there, did I?"

"If you're going in for singing I'd take les-

sons if I were you," I said unfeelingly one day.

"I think I shall," said she.

"But about Mother. Why did you want to know if I was writing?"

"Oh, I wanted you to ask her—— Dear me! what was I thinking of? Let me think a minute.

'We sat, you and I, while our aching hearts knew.'

"No, you didn't," I put in bluntly; "you did nothing of the kind. You married your first and only love, and he has never looked at any one else since, and neither have you. So do stop that horrid caterwauling ditty, and tell me what you want me to say to Mother."

Polly turned on me with a look of surprise. "Really, Anna," she said, with a sudden assumption of dignity; "really, Anna."

She didn't ask me to prolong my visit, and I was very glad of it. Even if it was rather dull down in Dovedale, and some of the people round

about did turn up their noses a little more than nature intended, life wasn't as irritating as it was at the Towers—life was life, and was lived in a reasonable, earnest kind of way, and not as if it were all make-believe. Father and Mother, though they had, bit by bit, launched out into a totally different life to what they had lived before, did live their life off their own, so to speak. And that, I believe, was why Mother went down with really good people as she did. You see, she never tried to make herself out one tiny scrap better than she was. "You must take me as I am or leave me," she said once or twice. "I am glad to give you a hearty welcome to my house, and a knife and fork at my table; but as for being stylish, as the girls call it, and caring whether it's polite or not to take a chair without asking, I really can't. My manners are old-fashioned like myself."

So Mother never did anything because it was

fashionable or etiquette or anything else. I did get her to look at "Hints" once, and she sat down and studied it right through just as if it had been a story-book.

"Anna, my child," she said, "I should never keep all this in mind—never. Don't ask me to go by it, for I should only get addled, and make worse mistakes than if I was left in my ignorance. I'm too old to learn new ways now, my dear."

And I am sure everyone liked her very much better as she was, simple and dignified and natural, than they would have done if she had started shaking hands about the level of her eyebrows, and had carefully got up the latest slang of the day. Mind you, I didn't always think so. Time was when I had positively blushed at Mother's homeliness, and had felt that I would just have given anything to have a mother that looked stylish and could sail into a room and freeze peo-

ple if need be. But that was before Polly got to be such a grand lady, and I felt it a perfect relief when I found myself at home once more with some one who didn't spend all her time playing at broken-hearted duchesses.

I had been at home nearly a week when I had a letter from Mr. Knipp.

"DEAR MISS BINKS" (it said),

"If it is quite agreeable to you, I should very much like to come down to call on you on Sunday afternoon, for the purpose of making your father and mother's acquaintance, and of renewing my acquaintance with you. I gather from my friend Beddingham that your station is only a mile or so from the house.

"Believe me, very truly yours,

"THOMAS HAYNES KNIPP."

"And who is he?" asked Mother.

"A friend of Oliver's. He's nice. You'll like him," I replied. "He isn't stuck-up or silly or stupid. A straight, quiet, good-looking man, a gentleman, without being too grand to put his foot in his mouth."

“Then you had better write and ask him to come down to lunch on Sunday,” Mother said, her mind flying to hospitality at once. “He can go by the 12.15 train from town, and we’ll send to meet him.”

I wrote to Mr. Knipp to that effect, and he answered joyfully accepting the invite. And then if Polly and Oliver didn’t send a wire late on the Saturday night saying that they were coming down by that train, and would we send to meet them? I really was vexed, and Polly made such a mouthful of it too when we met and she came up to my room to take off her big black hat and a soft lace scarf that was bunched up about her throat.

“I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the invincible bachelor waiting about on the platform,” she exclaimed. “And he quite blushed when he owned that he was coming down here. How came you to ask him?”

“I didn’t ask him; he asked himself to call,” I replied. “And then Mother said I’d better ask him to lunch.”

“Quite right. I shall devote myself to mother all the afternoon, and give Oliver a hint to go out and interest himself in cows and things. My dear, I’m delighted.”

It turned out that for all her fine-lady airs Polly had a few grains of common sense down at the bottom; for, really, she cleared out of my way in the most wonderful manner. She waited till Oliver had suggested, in his most new mahogany tones, to Father that they should take a turn round the farm, telling him that he was particularly anxious to see the little Jersey that had taken first prizes everywhere that season.

Father rose to that bait at once. “I’ll go round with pleasure; and I tell you, sir, though I say it as shouldn’t, that there’s not such a beauty as Tender-eyed Leah to be found in the length

and breadth of the land. Milk's my business and milch cattle are my hobby. She's well worth all she's cost me, and that's——" And then he took Oliver by the arm, and led him away, still talking hard on the merits, perfections, and beauties of Tender-eyed Leah.

CHAPTER XVI.

TENDER-EYED LEAH.

“Faint heart never won fair lady.”

WHEN Father and Oliver Beddingham had gone off to see Tender-eyed Leah, Polly turned to Mother, with a careless kind of air, and said—

“I hope Father isn’t offended at my not going to look at the cows. The fact is I have very thin shoes on, and I’m afraid of catching a chill. And besides that, I particularly want to ask you something. That was why we came down to-day.”

“I’m sure Father doesn’t mind, one way or another,” said Mother, smiling. “None of you children can ever think you don’t find your welcome waiting for you at home whenever you like to come for it. It seems so queer,” she went on,

“how some mothers alter to their children after they’re married. Only the other day young Mrs. Le Strange, the daughter of Miss Tellum, the great novelist, was here. She lives over at Thor-ganton, you know. She was telling me that she wanted to run up to town for a few days to get some frocks, only she didn’t know whether her mother could do with her. ‘Perhaps her house isn’t very large,’ said I. ‘Oh, yes, it is,’ she replied; ‘it’s a large house, but my mother is so awfully particular about our manner to her since we were married. It would be lovely if we could wire up to say we were coming, but we can’t. We always have to write a week or so before, and ask if it would be convenient to her to receive us.’ It seems downright unnatural,” Mother ended; “for surely if there’s one place in the world that children, whether married or single, ought to be able to go to without an invite, it’s to their mother’s.”

“They say cats always turn against their kittens when they’ve once left them,” said Polly. “And I read such a lovely, touching article the other day by Miss Tellum on mother love. Well, Mother, darling, none of yours will ever pain you in that way. And now, I want to carry you off, dear, so perhaps Anna will show Mr. Knipp round the gardens and look after him a little.”

Mr. Knipp got up, and, with a little bow, declared that the main object of his life was to see the Dove Hall gardens. So he and I went off together, and left Mother and Polly to have their chat undisturbed.

We went out by the front door, and along the terrace, down the steps, and into the rosary. I showed him everything. Never was a garden better shown, for I missed not a point, and neither did he; he was as good a sightseer as I was a showman. We went all through the houses, and then through the stables, although, being Sun-

day afternoon, only one of the boys was to be seen. And after that I asked him if he would like to go down and see the swans and the new Canadian ducks on the ornamental water which ran at the foot of the wilderness.

There was a queer little summer-house at the very end of the water, a funny little place that had been put there at the suggestion of the landscape gardener as being a pleasant, cool spot for smoking in, or for afternoon tea in hot weather, or for resting in in winter when the water was frozen over and we should all be skating upon it. As a matter of fact, we never had used it at all, for Father was a chilly soul, and liked his pipe in his own den and in his own big easy-chair better than anywhere else. "I wasn't bred up to smoking my pipe like a nobleman," he used to say, when I hinted that he never made use of his grand smoking pavilion. As for Mother, well used as she had got to her new life,

with a butler to carve her dinner and a maid to dress her hair, the one thing she could not get used to was having meals out-of-doors. She objected to the horrid insects that always seemed to be dropping about in the garden. So we, not having any ice, never had used the little pavilion by the water, and I don't know that I had ever sat down in it before until I went in with Mr. Knipp, and he proposed that we should rest a bit and look over the sunlit water, on which the swans and ducks were all swimming about in perfect happiness.

"It's awfully jolly here, Miss Binks," he said, when we had thoroughly discussed the water and the ducks and the pavilion.

"Yes; isn't it?" I rejoined.

"You didn't think it a great piece of cheek on my part asking myself down, I hope?"

"Oh, no, not at all. We were delighted to see you," I replied.

"It was awfully nice of your mother to ask me to lunch, too," he went on. "How very nice she is! And your father, too."

"Oh, do you really think so?" I exclaimed, rather impulsively.

"Yes, by Jove, that I do. I do like a man to be thoroughly interested in his life's business and to be expert at his own work, no matter what it is. One can see that your father is heart and soul in his Jerseys."

"Oh, he is, Mr. Knipp," I went on, all in a hurry. "I'm so glad you like my father and mother. I can't bear people who turn up their noses at them because they're not fine lady and gentleman. They're both so good and so generous and so genuine, and every day I live I admire and respect and love them more for being just what they are."

"And, by Jove, you've every cause to," he cried admiringly. "You don't know just how

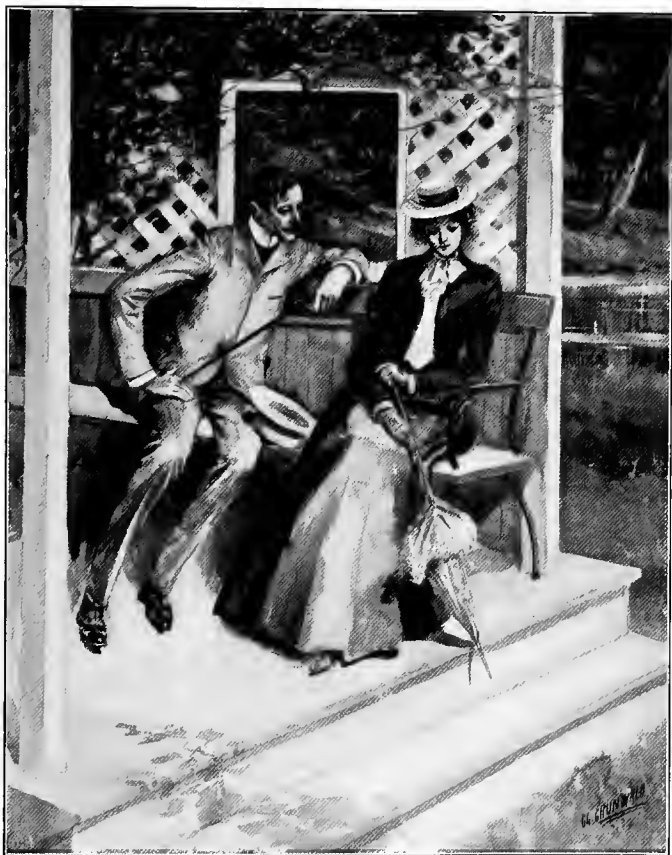
I feel about these things. Look here, I came down to-day with a special reason. I've a story to tell you and a question to ask you. People often wonder why I've never married. I'm rich, very rich, as perhaps Mrs. Beddingham has told you. She has often chaffed me about my single state, because—— Oh, well, as he has often put it, I might marry a duke's daughter. That's all rot, you know, for duke's daughters don't go around begging, and they don't, as a rule, marry City men. But seriously, I dare say I might have married over and over again, but for one reason—— ”

“ That is——? ”

“ I never cared to tell the story of my life to any woman before I met you,” he said simply.

“ And you will tell it to me? ”

“ If you will listen. Miss Binks, what first attracted me to you was something you said about your father. Fathers and mothers have a great



HIS VOICE DROPPED ALMOST TO A WHISPER.—*Page 229*

attraction for me. I never knew my mother, for, poor girl, she died when I was only two days old. As for a father, I never had one." His voice dropped almost to a whisper, and a dull burning red color overspread his face. But his eyes, blue and resolute still, looked straight into mine.

"Why have you told me this?" I asked. My voice, like my hands, was trembling.

"May I say why? Oh, surely you understand that you, with your clear, sensible mind, you, with your happy home-life, with your good-hearted, honest, loving married father and mother, have attracted me as I have never known what it was to be attracted by any woman in all my life. Anna, will you have me? I'm not your equal," he added, very humbly— "but will you have me?"

"My dear," I said gently, "I'm the proudest girl in England this day."

And so we got engaged, Tom and I. I made him tell me everything that he knew. How he had been brought up at a respectable farmhouse in the country; how a mysterious guardian lawyer had sent him to a good school, had paid all his clothing bills, given him ample pocket-money; and how, at eighteen, he had been sent for to this lawyer's office, and had then been told the tragedy of his birth and his poor little mother's death. He had been told that he would be well started in life, and that the rest would depend on himself. He had begged to know the name of his father, but was told that this could never under any circumstances be disclosed.

From that moment he had vowed that he would prove himself worthy of his betrayed mother and of his hard-hearted father. He had deliberately chosen to become a member of the Stock Exchange, not because his way had been thrown much among City men, but because he believed

stock-broking to be a profession at which he could rise to great fortune and power. His wish had been acceded to instantly. He had been entered as a pupil at a great stock-broking house, he was told that four hundred a-year would be his allowance until he came of age, and that when he was ready to find a partner, the necessary money would be forthcoming; and this afterwards proved to be no more than the truth.

And to-day Knipp and Bartle was one of the most solid and respected firms in all the city of London, and he had asked me to be his wife.

"I think, dear Tom," I said, "that we'll tell Father and Mother; but as to the others, I don't see that's any business of theirs. Do you?"

"I don't care in the least *now*," he said. "They are your people; you must do just as you like about it."

"Well, then, we'll keep it just to ourselves and them," I said. "And now if you want to make

Father very happy you'll come in to tea—I heard the bell ring—and then you'll ask him to take you to see Tender-eyed Leah."

THE END.

